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Monday, 30 November 1998, 3 p.m.
New York

President: Mr. Opertti .... (Uruguay)

In the absence of the President, Mr. Chkheidze (Georgia), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

Agenda item 39

Question of Palestine

Report of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People (A/53/35)

Report of the Secretary-General (A/53/652)

Draft resolutions (A/53/L.48, A/53/L.49, A/53/L.50, A/53/L.51)

The Acting President: I first give the floor to Mr. Ibra Deguène Ka of Senegal, in his capacity as Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, who will introduce draft resolutions A/53/L.48, L.49, L.50 and L.51 in the course of his statement.

Mr. Ka (Senegal), Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People (*interpretation from French*): I am greatly honoured once again to open the annual debate in the General Assembly on the question of Palestine in my capacity as Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People. I should like to take this opportunity to congratulate Mr. Opertti on his election as President of the Assembly and on the way in which he has guided our work at this session.

As the Assembly is aware, the item on the question of Palestine was reintroduced in the agenda of the General Assembly in 1974 when, after many years, it became apparent that the question of the fate and the rights of the Palestinian people had been overshadowed by inter-State conflicts. This question was not at that time among the issues discussed by the international community. The inclusion of the question in the agenda resulted above all from the recognition on the part of the international community at that time that the Arab-Israeli conflict could not be resolved peacefully until the question of Palestine — the core issue of the conflict — was settled equitably and on the basis of the recognition and exercise of the inalienable national rights of the Palestinian people.

The Assembly has defined those rights unambiguously and, in resolution 3236 (XXIX), adopted at the twenty-ninth session, it reaffirmed that they included Palestinians' right to self-determination without external interference, their right to independence and national sovereignty, their right to return to homes from which they had been displaced and uprooted and their right to recover their property. In resolutions ES-7/3 and 35/169 A, both adopted in 1980, it also reaffirmed the right of the Palestinian people to establish its own sovereign independent State.

This record contains the original text of speeches delivered in English and interpretations of speeches delivered in the other languages. Corrections should be submitted to original speeches only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and be sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned, *within one month of the date of the meeting*, to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, Room C-178. Corrections will be issued after the end of the session in a consolidated corrigendum.

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After so many years, and despite endless debates and the adoption of countless resolutions and declarations by the Security Council and the General Assembly, many other United Nations bodies, intergovernmental organizations and Governments, the dream of an independent Palestinian State has still not been realized.

Despite the hopes that were raised around the world by the agreements signed in 1991 and 1993, increasingly dark and heavy clouds have come to loom over the peace process, and numerous obstacles have impeded the process to the point of jeopardizing the achievements that were built up between 1991 and 1996.

Today, more than 50 years after the partition of Palestine, almost half of the 7 million Palestinians still live in refugee camps with no possibility of returning to their homes and villages or of being compensated for the loss of their property. Their economic problems and constant insecurity, the punitive raids against them and the psychological suffering of this people may not perhaps hit the headlines, but they should serve as a reminder of the historical injustice that has been done to the Palestinian people.

Since 1967, some 350,000 settlers have established themselves in the occupied Palestinian territories, including Jerusalem, in continuous violation of Article 49 of the Fourth Geneva Convention, which clearly stipulates that the occupying Power shall not deport or transfer parts of its own civilian population into the territory it occupies.

The creation of settlements has intensified in recent years, and it is continuing relentlessly. East Jerusalem has been illegally annexed and surrounded by colonies that not only cut it off from its natural hinterland in the West Bank but separate it from its Arab population by means of the establishment of extremist settler enclaves. Thus, Al-Khalil, a Palestinian town of over 100,000 people, had to be divided in such a way that 30,000 people must live under occupation so that just 400 settlers can remain there in complete security.

Land continues to be confiscated not only to allow for new settlements and for the expansion of existing ones, but to enable bypass roads to be constructed linking the settlements to each other and to Israel. The occupied territory is gradually being fragmented into a patchwork of separate zones that can be closed and easily controlled by military force. The prolonged closure of the zones under the jurisdiction of the Palestinian Authority and the constant denial of free passage between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip significantly disrupt the daily lives of Palestinians and cause serious damage to the young Palestinian economy. Such measures also undermine the credibility of the peace agreements, create mistrust between the parties and give rises to serious doubts about the possibility of reaching an understanding at a time when confidence-building measures should be given pride of place.

Throughout those long years, and despite all the suffering that they have endured, the Palestinian people have never despaired. They have continued steadfastly to believe in the justice of their cause and have patiently appealed to the international community to help restore their inalienable rights.

The historic compromise of 1993, which is based on mutual recognition by the two parties and the establishment of a negotiating process aimed at implementing Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) and in which the Palestinians participate as full and equal partners, was an important milestone. The agreements achieved since then, including the recent Wye Memorandum, show that a diplomatic solution that takes into account the rights and needs of both parties is indeed possible.

The sporadic incidents of violence by extremists on both sides who are opposed to reconciliation and the signing of agreements only underscores the need to act diligently and resolutely in order to bring about a just and peaceful settlement. It is clear that if such a settlement is to endure, it must be widely accepted and cannot be imposed by one side to serve its own interests. Israel's understandable security concerns will not be properly addressed by unilateral actions, in particular by building settlements. Such measures, which dispossess Palestinians of their assets and deprive them of their rights and well-being, do not foster a climate of confidence or an environment conducive to peaceful coexistence.

Our Committee, which was established to assist in achieving a just settlement of the Palestinian question that would enable the Palestinians to exercise their rights, has always welcomed the peace process as a historic step in the search for peace. We have endeavoured to assist by carrying out our mandate while continuing to press for the full exercise by the Palestinian people of its inalienable rights in accordance with international law.

We wish to express our deep gratitude to the many Governments and international organizations from around the world that have assisted us in our work this year, in particular the Government of Belgium for hosting the international Conference in Support of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, in Brussels, the Government of Egypt for hosting the International Meeting of Non-Governmental Organizations and the seminar on assistance to the Palestinian people, in Cairo, and the Government of Chile for hosting the Latin American and Caribbean Seminar and Symposium on Non-Governmental Organizations, in Santiago.

Our gratitude goes also to the Government of Italy for offering to host the Bethlehem 2000 international conference in Rome next February and to the Government of Namibia for offering to host the African meeting in support of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people in Windhoek in April next year.

We will continue to cooperate with all Governments, intergovernmental organizations, United Nations bodies and non-governmental organizations in their efforts to promote the just and peaceful settlement that we all desire until such time as the Palestinians can gain the seat that is rightfully theirs among the member States of the Assembly.

As Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, I should like to draw the attention of the Assembly to the four draft resolutions that have been circulated under this agenda item: A/53/L.48, A/53/L.49, A/53/L.50 and A/53/L.51. I wish to inform the Assembly that Algeria and Mali have joined the sponsors of the four draft resolutions.

The first three draft resolutions relate to the activities, respectively, of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, of the Division for Palestinian Rights and of the Department of Public Information. They reiterate the important mandates already conferred by large majorities in the General Assembly while seeking to take into account recent political developments and to build on recent experience in carrying out their programmes of work.

In accordance with the objectives of the Committee, we wish with these draft resolutions to ensure that our efforts in the coming year in support of Palestinian rights and of a just and peaceful solution to the question of Palestine are as useful and constructive as possible. We also intend to rationalize the use of our resources by targeting areas where our activities can be the most decisive, in cooperation, of course, with the relevant units of the Secretariat. Provision for the activities outlined in these draft resolutions is already included in the programme budget for the biennium 1998-1999.

The text of the fourth draft resolution, on the peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine, reflects the position of the General Assembly with respect to the central aspects of a settlement and reproduces the text of the previous resolution on this subject, while updating it to take into account, above all, the signing of the Wye River Memorandum and the hopes it has aroused.

These draft resolutions confirm positions, mandates and work programmes that are of particular importance at this crucial stage of the peace process. I therefore call on the General Assembly to give them even more massive support than that received by past resolutions.

The Acting President: I now call on Mr. George Saliba of Malta, Rapporteur of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, to introduce the Committee's report.

Mr. Saliba (Malta), Rapporteur of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People: It is an honour for me, in my capacity as Rapporteur, to present to the General Assembly the annual report of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People.

During the past year, the Committee continued to do its utmost to implement the mandate given to it by the General Assembly. This document covers the Committee's activities, as well as the new developments relating to the question of Palestine and the Israeli-Palestinian peace process since last year's report.

The introduction to the report is contained in chapter I, which describes briefly the Committee's objectives and concerns in the light of the evolving situation. Chapters II and III summarize the respective mandates of the Committee, the Division for Palestinian Rights of the Secretariat and the Department of Public Information and give information on the Committee's organization of work.

Chapter IV contains information on the situation relating to the question of Palestine, as monitored by the Committee in the course of the year. Although welcoming the signing of the Wye River Memorandum, which helped restart the peace process, the Committee expressed much concern at the worsening of the situation on the ground, including continued and escalating Israeli settlement activities throughout the occupied territory, and in particular in and around Jerusalem. As was the case last year, the Committee was alarmed by the position of the Government of Israel on the question of Jerusalem in general, especially its plans for the creation of what has been termed a Greater Jerusalem umbrella municipality, settlement construction in the neighbourhoods of Jebel Abu Ghneim and Ras al-Amud, Israel's policy with respect to Palestinian residency rights in Jerusalem, demolition of Palestinian houses and the closures of and curfews imposed on the Palestinian territory.

The main body of the report is in chapter V, which gives an account of the action taken by the Committee in accordance with General Assembly resolution 52/49. It details the action taken in the Security Council and the General Assembly, including participation in the resumed tenth emergency special session of the General Assembly and the meeting of the Security Council on 30 June 1998. The Chapter also covers the Committee's initiative in requesting the inclusion of the item entitled "Bethlehem 2000" on the agenda of the current session of the General Assembly. The chapter contains information on the participation by the Committee Chairman in the relevant international conferences, meetings and summits, at which he represented the Committee, as well as on the results of his efforts.

Chapter V also describes adjustments made by the Committee in its programme of work in order to meet the evolving situation in the most effective and constructive manner, while keeping in mind the continuing financial constraints of the Organization. The Bureau continued its useful and constructive dialogue with the European Union. During the year, the Committee organized a number of important meetings, namely the high-level Conference in Support of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People and the subsequent European Symposium of Non-Governmental Organizations, both held at Brussels in February; the United Nations International Meeting of Non-Governmental Organizations on the Question of Palestine and the subsequent seminar on assistance to the Palestinian people, both held at Cairo in April; the Latin American and Caribbean Seminar and Symposium of Non-Governmental Organizations, held at Santiago in May; and the North American Symposium of Non-Governmental Organizations, held at Headquarters in June. In this context, I would like to take this opportunity to express our profound thanks to the Governments of Belgium, Egypt and Chile for providing the venues and for facilitating the holding of these important events.

This chapter also provides information on the activities of the Division for Palestinian Rights in the areas of research, monitoring and publications, on the United Nations Information System on the Question of Palestine (UNISPAL), and on the assistance given for the electronic conversion of the records of the United Nations Conciliation Commission for Palestine. It also contains information on the training programme for staff of the Palestinian Authority in the workings of the United Nations. Finally, the chapter describes the 1997 observance of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People.

Chapter VI covers the work of the Department of Public Information in accordance with General Assembly resolution 52/51, including the publications and audio-visual activities of the Department and other activities carried out by the Department.

Chapter VII, the last chapter of the report, contains the conclusions of the Committee and its recommendations to the General Assembly. The Committee notes that, despite the undeniable achievements of the peace process since 1993, the dispossession of the Palestinian people has lasted for over a century and the dream of a Palestinian State is still unfulfilled. Most of the Palestinian and Arab territories occupied by Israel in 1967, including Jerusalem, remain under occupation, vulnerable to exploitation of resources, land confiscation and encroaching settlements.

The Committee believes that, as humankind prepares to enter the new millennium, it is incumbent upon the co-sponsors of the peace process, the Security Council and the international community as a whole to do everything within their power to achieve peace and reconciliation in the Middle East, which is so essential for international peace and security.

The Committee is of the view that the policies and practices of occupation, which seek to create actuality on the ground and to alter permanently the demographic composition of the occupied territory, violate the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination and statehood and make the achievement of real peace impossible. The international community, in particular the High Contracting Parties to the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, of 12 August 1949, must intensify efforts to ensure protection for the Palestinian people, pending the achievement of a final settlement.

The Committee reaffirms that the United Nations has a permanent responsibility with respect to the question of Palestine until a satisfactory settlement based on international legitimacy is reached. The Committee reiterates that the involvement of the United Nations in the peace process, both as the guardian of international legitimacy and in the mobilization and provision of international assistance for development, is essential for the success of the peace process.

The Committee considers that its programme of meetings in the various regions and its cooperation with non-governmental organizations have played a useful role in heightening international awareness of the relevant issues and in achieving wider recognition of and support for the achievement of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people. The Committee intends to continue to review and assess its programme in order to achieve maximum effectiveness and to respond adequately to developments.

The Committee supports the Bethlehem 2000 project launched by the Palestinian Authority. It requested the inclusion of an item on Bethlehem 2000 on the agenda of the fifty-third session of the General Assembly in order to mobilize wide international support for the event. The Committee is planning to convene a Bethlehem 2000 international conference at the Rome headquarters of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations next February, with the agreement and support of the Italian Government.

The Committee stresses the essential contribution of the Division for Palestinian Rights of the Secretariat in support of the objectives of the Committee and requests it to continue its programme of publications and other activities, in particular the further development of the United Nations Information System on the Question of Palestine and the completion of the project for the modernization of the records of the United Nations Conciliation Commission for Palestine. It also considers that the annual training programme for staff of the Palestinian Authority has demonstrated its usefulness, and requests that it be continued.

The Committee also considers that the special information programme on the question of Palestine of the Department of Public Information has made an important contribution to informing the media and public opinion of the relevant issues. The Committee calls for the strengthening of cooperation and coordination with the Department, and requests it to give particular attention to the preparation of audio-visual and other informational materials on the question of Palestine aimed at the general public.

Finally, the Committee calls upon all States to join in its endeavour to make the greatest possible contribution to the achievement of a just and lasting peace during the difficult times ahead, and invites the General Assembly again to recognize the importance of the role of the Committee and to reconfirm its mandate with overwhelming support.

I trust that the report of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People that I have just introduced will be of assistance to the General Assembly by facilitating its deliberations on this important issue.

Mr. Kaddoumi (Palestine) (*interpretation from Arabic*): I would like, at the outset of my statement, to extend our congratulations to the President on his election to the presidency of the General Assembly. We are confident that he will conduct the deliberations of this session with wisdom, and we trust in his ability to achieve the objectives of the United Nations to bring about peace and security. We would also like to extend our thanks to his predecessor, Mr. Hennadiy Udovenko, who so ably led the work of the previous session. We would also like to commend the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, for his efforts and persistent endeavours to solve outstanding problems and questions and for his attempts to maintain international peace and security.

We wish too to thank the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People and its Chairman, Ambassador Ibra Deguène Ka, for their persistent efforts to serve the question of Palestine, to ensure the rights of the Palestinian people and to put an end to Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories.

We are once again discussing the question of Palestine, as we have year after year, because of Israel's rejection of the resolutions of the Security Council and the General Assembly and because of its failure to adhere to the agreements already reached. Political negotiations have been faltering since Mr. Netanyahu took charge of the Israeli Government. The peace process has now reached a deadlock. No substantive achievements have been made so far; on the contrary, they were submerged by details that took the peace process off its appropriate track. When the Arab parties concerned with the political settlement had accepted it, that acceptance was made on the basis of international legitimacy and the implementation of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), the principle of land for peace and safeguarding the legitimate political rights of the Palestinian people. Those principles and resolutions stipulate the withdrawal of Israeli forces from the occupied Arab and Palestinian territories — including Al-Quds, which was occupied in 1967 — and call for ensuring the rights of the Palestinian people to self-determination and for exercising sovereignty over its territory.

The Madrid Peace Conference was held in 1991 to realize these objectives, and political negotiations began in Washington under the sponsorship of the United States of America and the Russian Federation. We hope that these objectives will be realized so that peace and stability may prevail in the Middle East region. However, Israel assassinated Mr. Rabin, and Mr. Netanyahu was elected and took power as Prime Minister.

Mr. Netanyahu insisted on returning to discussing the previous accords and agreements, in contradiction of international norms and covenants, in order to evade his commitments, to formulate new agreements and to impose a new fait accompli through pursuing the policy of confiscating land, building new settlements and expanding existing settlements. He has not even carried out the agreements that he himself signed. He began to procrastinate and waste time under the pretext that Israeli security was in jeopardy and that it was necessary to conclude security agreements. When those agreements were concluded he refused them, in spite of the fact that the United States had taken part in the drafting of those agreements through the participation of the Central Intelligence Agency and that it had become a party to them.

The Palestinian party insisted on the need for the Israeli Government to abide by its commitment to put an end to the settlements policy, the confiscation of Palestinian territory and the demolition of houses. We also insisted on the withdrawal of the Israeli forces from occupied Palestinian territories in accordance with the Oslo agreements, which stipulate that Israel must withdraw from the West Bank in three phases. However, when the meeting at Wye Plantation was held, this still had not taken place.

During that period, Mr. Netanyahu continued the economic and security blockade of the Palestinian people and even tightened it further. He pursued his terrorist and repressive practices, disseminating false allegations that the Palestinians threatened the security of Israel. Despite its active diplomacy over the last two years, the United States was unable to convince the current Israeli Government to implement the agreements already reached or to adhere to the principles and bases upon which the peace process was founded.

Furthermore, through a decision adopted on 14 January 1998, the Israeli Government has defined what it considered to be vital Israeli interests which it will not concede in either interim or permanent agreements. That decision was published at that time in the semi-official Israeli newspaper, *The Jerusalem Post*. Those interests included the western and eastern security zones, Jerusalem and its environs, areas of Jewish settlements, water and electricity infrastructures, security and military installations, roads from north to south and from east to west and Jewish places of worship. All of this took place before the well-known meetings between Mr. Clinton, Mr. Netanyahu and President Arafat on 20 and 22 January 1998. The Israeli Government confirmed that it will keep these areas under its control when it endorsed the Wye Plantation agreement.

After difficult negotiations at Wye Plantation, the negotiators reached an agreement for the partial redeployment of the Israeli army from Palestinian areas. That agreement stressed the security issues associated with combatting terrorism and violence and called on the Palestinian people not to undertake such practices. However, it unfortunately failed to mention the Israeli occupation, the biggest of all evils and the root of all acts of violence and terrorism. Yes, indeed, once that occupation is brought to an end, security and stability will prevail.

Israel, owing to its occupation of the Palestinian territories and its policies and practices of oppression and terrorism, is the party that should be condemned — not the Palestinian side, which is defending not only its rights but its very survival and existence. The Palestinian people are subjected to abuse as a result of the practices of the occupying Israeli army and the Israeli settlers, who day by day usurp more land, establishing their own settlements and using arms to attack the peaceful Palestinian citizens, who are the indigenous inhabitants of the land.

The Israeli Government has contravened these Agreements, distorted them, changed their provisions, and imposed what they want, all under the nose of the sponsors of the peace process. Mr. Netanyahu did not hesitate to falsify historical facts and to allege that the

Jews had the right to all of Palestine, thus denying our right to sovereignty and self-determination after having occupied our land and our homes in all the Palestinian towns and villages. Now he is trying to obliterate our national identity.

Last September, when this session was beginning, Mr. Netanyahu spoke arrogantly before the Assembly. I shall quote from parts of his statement:

(spoke in English)

> "It can no longer be claimed ... that Israel is occupying the Palestinians. We do not govern their lives ... The territory we are negotiating about is virtually uninhabited by Palestinians ... Yet this land is the canvas on which thousands of years of Jewish history have been etched ... to part with one square inch is agonizing for us ... Every stone and every hill and valley ... resonates with our forefathers' footsteps" *(A/53/PV.13, p.14)*.

(spoke in Arabic)

This is the racist Netanyahu. Can one who says such words believe in peace? Does he even have the desire to find a peaceful solution? He had tried to falsify history in order to create historical legitimacy, even though Israel, historically speaking, was born only yesterday here in the United Nations.

Since 1967, the General Assembly and the Security Council have affirmed unanimously that the Palestinian territories, and first and foremost Jerusalem, are territories which are occupied by Israel and that the Fourth Geneva Convention is applicable.

It is well known that the Hebrew people passed through parts of the Palestinian land thousands of years ago. They lived there for only 150 years, whereas our Canaanite and Palestinian forefathers had established their civilization and been living there for tens of centuries beforehand — Jericho and Al-Quds are testimony to that. The Canaanite water channels recently discovered in Jerusalem are clear evidence of the authenticity of our people's civilization.

Netanyahu's political presentation shows clearly that the facts have been falsified and distorted. Everyone knows that the Israeli army is occupying the Arab and Palestinian territories, denying us our right to self-determination. This deprives our people of the right to sovereignty on their own territory. Israel has gone even further than that: it has bulldozed villages and built Jewish settlements in their place, after having displaced the Palestinians and prevented them from returning.

In accordance with the Declaration of Principles, Israel was supposed to implement all of its obligations during the transitional period by handing over 37 local administrative units to the Palestinians and returning 750,000 Palestinian refugees who had been expelled during the Israeli aggression of 1967.

A quadripartite commission, consisting of Egypt, Jordan, Palestine and Israel, met during the transitional stage to attempt to reach a solution. However, Israel has frozen the work of that Commission, and so far not one single displaced person has been able to return. Even the Wye River Memorandum, concluded recently, ignored this very vital issue.

Israel has retained control over all of the infrastructures and vital services such as water, electricity, telephone service, imports and exports. It has expropriated and confiscated land, built settlements and demolished homes. Many thousands of Palestinian freedom fighters are still detained in Israeli jails. This is not to mention the blockades and curfews which are periodically imposed.

Strange as all of this seems, the Israeli authorities still claim that they want to achieve reconciliation with the Palestinian people and the Arab people. It is also regrettable that the letters of assurance forwarded by the United States to the Israeli Government after the Wye agreement affirm that Israel alone can determine its security requirements and decide upon the appropriate solutions. This provision attests clearly to Israel's intent to renege on its commitments to uphold a United States pledge, particularly the implementation of the third redeployment phase, and that the second redeployment stage, if carried out, is the last. This means that Israel will keep 60 per cent of the Palestinian territories and will share with the Palestinian Authority the administration of 21 per cent of that area.

Is this the final solution from Israel's perspective? The conflict between us and Israel was never about institutions and administration but about land — our land — and our right to exercise our sovereignty on that land. This was the crux of the political settlement that was included in Security Council resolution 242 (1967), which calls for the withdrawal of Israel from all the occupied Palestinian and Arab territories, including Jerusalem/Al-Quds. It is very strange that the declaration by the Palestinian Authority that it will establish its State is considered a unilateral act violating the Agreement while in Israel's view the settlements and the confiscation of Palestinian land, the construction of bypass roads and the demolition of houses do not constitute a unilateral action — despite the fact that such declaration by the Palestinian Authority is one of the conditions Yitzhak Rabin agreed to when United States President George Bush assured him that Israel would receive loan guarantees.

The Charter of the United Nations provides for the right of peoples to self-determination. Thus the United Nations resolutions have stressed the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination and to the establishment of an independent and sovereign State of Palestine. Security Council resolution 363 (1974) of November 1974 and Assembly resolutions 37/86 of December 1982 and 181 (II) of 1947 were adopted to affirm that right.

Israel claims that it is a democratic State. The Israelis engage in all forms of opposition and criticism, and some Israelis even go even further, demanding the expulsion of the Palestinians from their country. However, when the Palestinians exercise their right to criticize and express their opinions it is considered abetting violence and a call for terrorism.

Israel has violated human rights and practised persecution and racial discrimination against the Arab citizens in Israel. It continues to do so.

On 18 October 1998 an Israeli newspaper published an article that stated that international Jewish institutions are conducting negotiations with 23 countries in an attempt to either restore the Jewish property confiscated during the Second World War or to win compensation for these confiscations. To date, the article said, Germany has compensated the Jewish people by paying 200 billion deutsche marks.

However, the negotiators from the Jewish and Israeli groups do not give their opinion regarding compensating other parties whose property has been usurped. Is it appropriate for a State to ask for compensation for properties that were usurped when it usurps the properties of others and refuses to even consider their claims for compensation? Is there a difference between the land of a Palestinian peasant taken in Israel and the land of a Jewish peasant taken in Lithuania? Both of these farmers fled; they escaped or were forced to flee though they had not committed any crime. Is there any difference at all between a lost home in Jerusalem and a lost home in Warsaw? Dispossession is dispossession, usurpation is usurpation — they are unjust even if the circumstances are different.

The author of the article went on to say that, according to the statistics of a Jerusalem municipal official, the Palestinians had left about 4.5 dunums of land, and about 60 per cent of the houses in West Jerusalem were Palestinian homes, as were hundreds of thousands of housing units in towns and Palestinian villages. The article's author, who was deputy to the head of the Jerusalem municipality, goes on to say that the value of abandoned Arab property in Israel was estimated in the billions of 1950s' dollars.

Further, there are now about 700,000 refugees scattered all over the world. Most of them remain very needy people today. There are also 150,000 Arab citizens still in the country — present yet absent. They are refugees in their own country. Israel so far has not returned their property to them.

The author went on to say that maybe it was not yet time for compensation. Most of the Palestinians have yet to accept that any compensation be paid before negotiations are finalized on the return of the refugees, within the framework of a permanent settlement. This article is a testimony by an Israeli citizen.

The President took the Chair.

The return of refugees is a right consecrated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, as well as in many other international instruments. Its international legitimacy has been confirmed by General Assembly and Security Council resolutions. The international legitimacy of the right of the Palestinian refugees to return has been established and confirmed through the United Nations resolutions. The Declaration of Principles agreement stipulated the return of people displaced by the Israeli aggression of 1967. However, Israel still refuses to implement this agreement.

The subsequent Israeli Governments, including the current one, have refused to return to the line of 4 June 1967, the truce lines, and consider Jerusalem the eternal capital of Israel within Israel's sovereignty. The Israeli Government says that never will this position be renounced, knowing that the Security Council has unanimously called upon Israel to withdraw from Arab Jerusalem on the grounds that it is an occupied territory, according to Council resolutions 242 (1967), 465 (1980) and 478 (1980).

And here we also have to cite the position of the Holy See, as stated by Archbishop Tauran, Minister for Foreign Affairs for the Holy See, during the international conference of Catholic bishops held this October in Jerusalem to discuss that city's future. I quote:

(spoke in English)

> "The prevailing situation in the Holy City was brought about by force and has been preserved by force since 1967. A part of the city has been occupied militarily and subsequently annexed. East Jerusalem is illegally occupied. It is therefore wrong to claim that the Holy See is only interested in the religious aspect or aspects of the city and overlooks the political and territorial aspects. There is nothing to prevent Jerusalem in its unity and uniqueness from becoming a symbolic land, the national centre of both of the peoples that claim it as their capital."

This is what Archbishop Tauran stated at that international conference in Jerusalem.

(spoke in Arabic)

Here I recall the position of the United Kingdom, which was announced by Malcolm Rifkind, the former Foreign Secretary of that country, as follows:

(spoke in English)

> "Israel is in military occupation of East Jerusalem and has only de facto authority over West Jerusalem."

(spoke in Arabic)

These are substantive matters related to the question of Palestine and in regard to which there can be no concession, for without dealing with them there can be neither peace nor stability. Moreover, we have to take into account the hundreds of settlements scattered throughout the occupied Palestinian territories and the Israeli Government's intention to build more settlements after confiscating tens of thousands of dunums of Palestinian land.

Israel, by its policy and conduct, as well as by its actions, is sabotaging all chances for peace. The criteria are still different when the United States deals with the concerned parties. Were such unjust settlements to be imposed on the Palestinian people, that would never lead to stability, security or peace. This is because we believe that the continued occupation, injustice and oppression carry within them the elements of tension and explosion. The question of Palestine is the crux of the Arab-Israeli conflict. A just and comprehensive settlement cannot be achieved unless the Israeli occupation is completely eliminated from all occupied Palestinian and Arab territories, including Jerusalem/Al-Quds, and the refugees return to their homes to enable the other Arab tracks, which have been plagued with stagnation, to meet with success.

With the advent of the year 2000, both the past and the future will meet in Bethlehem — in Palestine — where there will be for all peoples one global vision of hope and peace. All voices will there rise to glorify God on high peace on earth, and happiness to the people. The world will commemorate the second millennium since the birth of Christ and the beginning of a new millennium. This is a historic and religious opportunity for all believers in the world and the international community as a whole — not only for the Palestinian people and the region. We are looking forward to effective participation by the international community in the serious preparation for this celebration of the commemoration of the birth of Christ beginning in 1999 and lasting until Easter in the year 2001.

The Lebanese and the Syrian tracks are still facing a deadlock. The Israeli Government persists in ignoring the agreements that were reached with the previous Government on the Syrian track and insists on starting *de novo*. Also, there are official declarations saying that the Golan is a strategic area that cannot be dispensed with, nor could Israel return to the armistice line of June 1967. Prior to this, the Israeli Knesset even decided to annex the Golan to Israel.

As for Lebanon, the Security Council adopted resolution 425 (1978), which stipulated an unconditional and immediate withdrawal of the Israeli forces from southern Lebanon. The Council also adopted resolution 426 (1978), which included a specified mechanism for the implementation of resolution 425 (1978) through the establishment of an international interim force under the command of the Security Council to verify the withdrawal of the Israeli troops and the restoration of international peace and security as it had been before. However, Israel rejected the implementation of this resolution and manoeuvred by presenting counter-proposals, in addition to establishing a security belt under its command in southern Lebanon.

Here we have to refer to the fact that the continued blockades imposed on the Iraqi people and on the Libyan people will only increase tension in the Middle East region. This is at a time when the Arab peoples see that Israel owns weapons of mass destruction and is not accountable to anyone. Nor is Israel asked to implement the Security Council resolutions which now number, I would say, over 20 resolutions.

The security agreements that have been reached so far will not help the issue of peace and security in the region before a comprehensive and just settlement is reached. Peace can be established only by reaching a comprehensive and just solution that takes into account a balance of interests between the peoples and the States of the region, apart from bilateral or multilateral blocs. Such blocs carry within them the seeds of conflict and regional wars, which we do not need in such a very sensitive region, given its strategic importance and its location.

In such a region, wars can break out at any time as a result of the continued Israeli occupation of the Syrian, Lebanese and Palestinian territories, the policy of security blocs and the blockade imposed on a number of States and peoples of the region. At the end of the cold war, there was an agreement to use peaceful means to solve regional problems and questions rather than resorting to military force or even the threat of military force. The United Nations, including the Security Council, has to consecrate these principles. Respect for human rights, the right of self-determination for the peoples of the region, non-interference in the internal affairs of peoples and respect for the national and regional sovereignty of peoples are real achievements which eventually allow for opportunities for further cooperation and peaceful coexistence among the peoples of the region.

In conclusion, I would like to affirm that the solution to the Israeli-Arab conflict lies in finding a just settlement of the question of Palestine, in accordance with international legitimacy. Thus, the United Nations and all of its specialized agencies continue to be the only appropriate forum for the question of Palestine and its only acceptable and legitimate reference.

Mr. Sucharipa (Austria): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union. In addition, the Central and Eastern European countries associated with the European Union — Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia — and the associated country Cyprus, as well as the European Free Trade Association countries members of the European Economic Area, Iceland and Liechtenstein, align themselves with this statement.

After the impasse in the Middle East peace process, the signing of the Wye River Memorandum by Prime Minister Netanyahu and Chairman Arafat in Washington on 23 October 1998 brought about the long-awaited breakthrough, which put the peace process back in motion. It has given rise to genuine hope that a just, secure and comprehensive peace in the Middle East is within sight.

The European Union recognizes the sensitivity of the issues negotiated at Wye River Plantation and congratulates the parties for their courage and high sense of responsibility, which allowed the successful conclusion of the talks. The European Union is of the opinion that the sustained political commitment of the parties and the determination to resist those attempting to frustrate the promising progress towards peace will lead to the full implementation of the agreement. This will help restore the mutual trust as well as the confidence of the parties to the peace process.

The European Union welcomes the steps undertaken by the parties so far to implement the Wye River Memorandum, especially in the field of security arrangements and the redeployment of troops. The Union would like to take this opportunity to call upon the international community to lend its full support to this promising phase in the peace process.

We are equally pleased with the inauguration of the Gaza airport on 24 November 1998. The European Union now calls upon the parties to complete negotiations as soon as possible on those remaining issues under the Interim Agreement still not settled — especially regarding the industrial zone in Karni, the Gaza port and safe passage between Gaza and the West Bank — and to fully engage with a spirit of cooperation and perseverance in final status negotiations.

In this context, the European Union strongly insists on the need to abstain from unilateral acts in the context of the Oslo and Madrid agreements, that could prejudge the final outcome of the negotiations. We reiterate that the principles set out in Security Council resolution 242 (1967) and that the Fourth Geneva Convention are fully applicable to all the occupied territories, including East Jerusalem. In this regard, we consider settlement activities as illegal and an obstacle to peace. The European Union would also like to stress the importance of the commitment to the principles of democracy and to respect for all human rights and fundamental freedoms.

The President of the Council of Ministers of the European Union, Vice-Chancellor Wolfgang Schüssel, visited the Middle East from 12 to 15 November 1998 at a critical stage in the implementation of the Wye River Memorandum. This visit underlined the European Union's unwavering support for and determination to stay actively engaged in the Oslo process.

The European Union will continue to make constructive and effective contributions, including through its Special Envoy, Ambassador Moratinos, in order to restore and strengthen confidence between the parties. We are ready to be fully associated with the implementation of the Wye River Memorandum and to contribute to the final status negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians.

The European Union underlines the importance of progress in the peace process with a view to improving, *inter alia*, investor confidence and promoting the sustainability and greater self-sufficiency of the Palestinian economy. The European Union reaffirms its resolution to continue its economic and technical assistance. We will especially concentrate on helping to build a sound and prosperous economy in the Palestinian territory, aimed at facilitating social and political stability among the Palestinians.

With regard to support for the Palestinian people, we would also like to mention that, on 9 November 1998, the Council of Ministers of the European Union authorized the European Commission to negotiate the renewal of the Convention between the European Commission and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). The new Convention shall allow important contributions to education, health and food-aid programmes.

We welcome the convening today in Washington of the Ministerial Conference to support Middle East Peace and Development. The European Union will take this opportunity to underline its continued commitment to the peace process through a renewal of its financial assistance to the Palestinian Authority. The European Union will also play a central role in the technical follow-up to the Conference.

In concluding, the European Union reiterates its firm commitment to a just and comprehensive settlement based on the Madrid and Oslo accords. We are determined to fully assist the parties in their efforts to bring about durable peace in the Middle East.

Mr. Effendi (Indonesia): As the twentieth century draws to a close, the question of Palestine, regrettably, remains a difficult challenge for the United Nations. The facts clearly testify that peace and stability in the region will continue to be elusive until the inalienable rights of the Palestinians to self-determination and independence are fully realized. Consequently, it is imperative for the international community to sustain its efforts in promoting the cause of peace until the Palestinian and other occupied lands in the region are returned to their rightful owners.

Indonesia, naturally, is gratified by the intensive efforts of all the concerned parties culminating in the Wye River Memorandum, despite setbacks, provocations and other formidable obstacles. As we all know, the Memorandum touches on five basic issues: further Israeli withdrawal from 13 per cent of the West Bank; steps to be taken in addressing security concerns; the reaffirmation of the peace process by interim committees; the recommitment of all parties to respecting international law during the transitional period; and the commitment to resuming final status negotiations.

Indonesia particularly welcomes the conclusion of the aforementioned Memorandum, because it offers a glimmer of hope that, after more than two years of a stalemate in the peace process, the talks are back on track. It is important at this critical moment in the history of the region that the provisions of the Memorandum be fully implemented in good faith and sincerity. This is deemed necessary so that it may replace the prevailing atmosphere of despair and tension with confidence and trust among the peoples of the territories and to provide the much-needed momentum to expedite the final status negotiations. In this regard, we consider the inauguration of the Gaza International Airport on 24 November 1998 as a positive step forward in the peace process and in symbolizing the consolidation of Palestine's sovereignty in its territories.

There can be no doubt that one of the principal obstacles on the road to a secured peace is the issue of settlements. These illegal activities have often in the past dealt a serious setback to the fragile peace just when we thought that peace would be given a chance to bloom and flourish. Thus, there should be no more hesitation to put an end to these illegal activities, as they are also in complete violation of the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, of 12 August 1949, General Assembly and Security Council resolutions, as well as the relevant peace agreements.

At this juncture of our intensive and concerted efforts, it is important to keep reminding ourselves that the seeds of peace can take root and grow in the Middle East region only if they are based on the full implementation of United Nations and Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978), and on the principle of land for peace. The United Nations should remain seized of this item, especially in its capacity as a guarantor of international legitimacy, if a successful outcome of the peace efforts is to be achieved. Equally important is the pivotal role of the United Nations in the mobilization of international assistance for development as the Palestinians face the arduous process of nation-building. As history has demonstrated, emancipation without development is independence without substance. Therefore, it behoves the international community to marshal resources to help this nascent nation.

Finally, as the world is about to enter a new millennium, there can be no justification for prolonging this conflict any longer. We must collectively make unstinted efforts in relegating this tragic chapter of world history to the past by moving decisively forward and facilitating every endeavour whereby the state and the people of Palestine can finally live in peace, prosperity and harmony with its neighbours.

Mr. Shen Guofang (China) (*interpretation from Chinese*): Thanks to the concerted efforts of the Palestinian and Israeli sides, as well as the extensive support of the international community, marked progress has been made in the Middle East peace process since the Madrid Conference. Last October, Palestine and Israel reached an agreement on the second phase of the withdrawal of Israeli troops from the West Bank of the Jordan River. This represents an important step forward in the process of establishing self-rule for the Palestinian people. We welcome this development and hope that the parties concerned will carry out their obligations seriously, continue to adopt a flexible and pragmatic approach, implement the existing agreements in earnest, remove obstructions and push the peace process forward on the basis of the relevant United Nations resolutions and the principle of land for peace.

Since Palestine gained self rule, for reasons that everybody is well aware of, economic development in areas of self-rule has been far from satisfactory. The international community is duty-bound to provide stronger support and more assistance to the Palestinian people to help the Palestinian self-rule Government reinvigorate and develop its economy to improve its people's livelihood.

In recent years, the United Nations has played an increasingly important role in settling regional disputes and maintaining world peace. The Organization has made a tremendous contribution to the settlement of the question of Palestine and the question of the Middle East as a whole. In July this year, the General Assembly adopted resolution 52/250, "Participation of Palestine in the work of the United Nations". Palestine's observer status at the United Nations was elevated. We believe that the United Nations will play an even more active role in promoting the Middle East peace process and bringing about a final settlement of the question of Palestine and the Middle East.

The Chinese Government and people are very concerned about the development of the situation in the Middle East. We believe that the question of Palestine is at the core of the Middle East question. Only when the question of Palestine is resolved in a just and reasonable manner and all the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people are restored can Palestine and Israel enjoy real and lasting peace. We will, as always, join the rest of the international community and continue to work tirelessly for a comprehensive and fair settlement of the question of Palestine and the question of Middle East.

Mr. Kittikhoun (Lao People's Democratic Republic) (*interpretation from French*): Last year, at the fifty-second session of the General Assembly, like the majority of Member States, the Lao delegation expressed its concern over the grave deterioration of the peace process in the Middle East in the wake of the establishment of new settlements in Har Homa in East Jerusalem. Acts of violence, even killings, were committed, and even worse, armed clashes occurred, endangering the peace process supported and advocated by the international community. The parties lost their trust in each other, and a climate of tension and general insecurity prevailed. Since then, the international community has continuously sought to encourage the parties concerned to make a greater effort to restore a climate of mutual trust and to seriously pursue their negotiations with the aim of achieving a comprehensive solution to their dispute.

On 23 October 1998, to everyone's satisfaction, the Wye Plantation agreement, after lengthy and laborious negotiations, was signed by Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization. We greatly commend the two parties for their courage, their spirit of reconciliation and their political vision, which made such an achievement possible. The deadlock that the peace process had experienced for almost two years was finally broken, and my delegation expresses the hope that the two parties concerned will implement this agreement fully and sincerely, which would open the way to a negotiated settlement of the question of Palestine, which has now existed for almost five decades.

There remains much to be done. The problem is complex and extremely sensitive, and it is important that both parties demonstrate wisdom, restraint and, above all, great patience in their relations in the coming months. In this context, my country, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, wishes them every success and good luck.

The question of Palestine is, of course, one of the thorniest questions of our times. However, we believe that this one like many other thorny problems the world faces, can be resolved, providing the parties directly concerned have the necessary political will to resolve it. The Palestinian people have already suffered too much, and the international community must do everything possible to assist the two parties in resolving their problems. It is true that the road to peace is not an easy one, because obstacles remain. However, the cause of peace is just and represents the ardent hope of the people of the region to live together, to cooperate and to coexist peacefully.

On 14 May 1948, the State of Israel was created. The international community today impatiently awaits the creation of an independent Palestinian state, a good and friendly neighbour of Israel, in accordance with the partition plan adopted by the General Assembly on 29 November 1947. It is with this spirit of optimism that my delegation sees the future of the Middle East region.

Mr. Maruatona (Botswana): It is common knowledge that the question of Palestine is the epicentre of the Arab-Israeli dispute. It is abundantly clear that without a comprehensive and just solution to the question of Palestine, prospects for peace and stability will continue to elude the Middle East.

The presence all over the Middle East of close to 3.5 million Palestinian refugees serves as a constant reminder, not only of the cruelty and tragedy of statelessness and homelessness, but also that a permanent solution must be found, and found soon, to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict if a catastrophe is to be avoided in the area. The Palestinian people still remain a nation of refugees despite the fact that they have a territory they rightly and proudly call their own. My delegation has over the years maintained that only the realization of the inalienable right of the Palestinian people will lead to a permanent solution to the question of Palestine.

The people of Palestine have a right to return to their homeland in safety and dignity. Their right to return cannot and must not be permanently treated as inherently inimical to the existence of the State of Israel. The existence of the State of Israel is a reality that cannot be wished away, and the Palestinians, like all peoples worldwide, are entitled to their right to self-determination on the basis of the United Nations Charter and the relevant resolutions of the General Assembly and the Security Council.

It is sad that hostilities in the Middle East are between peoples that trace their origins to the same land, whose languages and cultures share an organic affinity, and for which cooperation in all fields of human endeavour would seem only natural. It would seem only logical that the Israelis and the Palestinians should be engaging each other meaningfully in the search for solutions to their dispute. It is not only in the interest of the Israelis and the Palestinians that peace and stability be realized in the Middle East; it is also in the interest of regional and international peace and security.

While the international community cannot shirk its responsibility for the expeditious resolution of the question of Palestine, the onus for the advancement of the peace process rests primarily with the parties to the conflict themselves. The Oslo agreements and the signing in Washington, D.C., in September 1993 of the Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements, which provided for the phased withdrawal of Israeli forces and the establishment of the Palestinian Authority, have laid a firm foundation for the development of a culture of peaceful coexistence in the Middle East.

We call upon both parties, especially the State of Israel, to comply fully with the Oslo agreements and to refrain from all unilateral measures and actions that might compromise the outcome of the final status negotiations. The construction of Jewish settlements in the occupied territories contributes negatively to the peace process; and we call upon the Government of Israel to desist from pursuing such a policy.

The signing of the Wye River Memorandum on 23 October 1998 between Israel and the Palestinian Authority is a welcome development in the efforts to resurrect the peace process from stalemate. It is the ardent hope of my delegation that the Wye River spirit of cooperation and understanding will contribute in no small measure to the implementation of the accords previously reached between the two parties. The Israelis and the Palestinians should now be working towards the final status negotiations without which a comprehensive, just and lasting solution to the question of Palestine would remain a pipe dream.

Finally, a solution to the question of Palestine has never been closer. The uncompromising position of the State of Israel with regard to its security needs has certainly contributed to slowing the peace process. Admittedly, Israel has legitimate security concerns and has the right to live in safety within secure boundaries, but this right must not be realized by means which could make the people of Palestine lose trust and confidence in the leadership of the Palestinian Authority.

Mr. Nahid (Bangladesh): Today the United Nations is observing the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. It is therefore fitting that the Assembly is considering the question of Palestine today. With your permission, Mr. President, we will include our comments on the situation in the Middle East, which comes under agenda item 40 in this statement.

For the last half century, the question of Palestine has been discussed in this Assembly, and the international community has repeatedly called upon Israel to halt its illegal activities, end its occupation of and vacate Arab and Palestinian territories. Foreign occupation in itself constitutes a flagrant violation of human rights. Prolonged occupation only worsens the process.

The Israeli occupation of Palestine and other Arab territories represents an utter violation of and persistent disregard for international law. In the occupied territories, Israel is continuing with its agenda of suppressing resistance against occupation. In doing so, it applies tactics that generate various forms of human rights violations. The actions of individuals continue to result in massive retaliations by the Israelis, in the form of collective punishments such as blockades, the demolition of houses, the confiscation of property and collective searches.

We firmly believe that for a lasting peace in the Middle East, the question of Palestine needs to be addressed seriously. Nothing short of the peaceful settlement of the Palestine question will help in resolving the crisis of the Middle East. The inalienable rights of the Palestinian people must be recognized and realized. Israeli withdrawal from all Palestinian and occupied Arab territories, including the Golan, is essential for any meaningful progress in the peace process. Meanwhile, Israel must stop immediately all settlement plans in Palestine and the occupied Arab territories.

Israeli settlement in the occupied territories has always been a serious source of tension. We are disappointed to know that there have been 194 Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories. Of those 194 settlements, 67 have been expanded or built since the signing of the Oslo accords. It is regrettable that instead of continuing the process of freezing settlement activities, in February 1997 Israel authorized the building of new settlements, including the one in Jebel Abu Ghneim in East Jerusalem. The completion of this settlement will result in Arab-populated East Jerusalem being fully encircled by settlement chains. This will eventually have a significant effect on the demography of East Jerusalem.

The Israeli decision with regard to the expansion of the municipal boundaries of Jerusalem was discussed in the Security Council in June 1998. The international community urged Israel to refrain from the implementation of its decision, as such a plan would create an increased Jewish majority in the city, and disturb the moratorium imposed by the Council. We are concerned at Israeli decisions to designate its settlement activities as a national priority. This is another attempt at deliberate encroachment and at the provocation of the sentiments of the people of the occupied territories. Such actions are in no way favourable to the Middle East peace process.

Similarly, the confiscation of land, the restriction of access to water resources and the demolition of houses in the occupied Palestinian and Arab territories, including the Golan, will in no way bring the desired peace to the region. The indiscriminate destruction of lives and properties in southern Lebanon has become a routine affair.

Bangladesh expresses its utter condemnation of the Israeli policy of systematic violation of basic human rights in the occupied territories. We express our total solidarity with our Palestinian and Arab brothers in this regard. We would like to remind Israel that under the 1949 Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, and under relevant resolutions, Israel is obliged to guarantee the basic human rights of the people under its occupation. The Security Council, in 25 of its resolutions adopted over the years, has reconfirmed its recognition of the applicability of the Fourth Geneva Convention in the territories occupied since 1967, including Jerusalem. Hence, there is no scope for unilateral refusals.

We call upon Israel to terminate completely its occupation of Palestine and other Arab territories, including Jerusalem, without delay. That would be a significant step forward in the realization of peace in the region. We believe that the developments following the Wye River Memorandum are promising. Bangladesh would like to underscore the need for the implementation of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978), which form the basis of the Middle East peace process, as well as other subsequent agreements reached among the parties aimed at the resolution of the problem. We also reaffirm our conviction that the Palestine issue is the core of the Middle East problem.

Allow me to quote from the message of the Prime Minister of Bangladesh, Sheikh Hasina, on the occasion of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People:

> "On this day, the people of Bangladesh once again join me in reaffirming our support and total commitment to the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, including the right to self-determination, the right to national independence and sovereignty and the right to their homes and land."

In conclusion, Bangladesh reaffirms that the United Nations has a permanent responsibility with respect to the question of Palestine and the other Arab territories under occupation by Israel until a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement is reached. We believe that the active involvement of the United Nations and the international community is essential for the successful outcome of the peace efforts.

Mr. Samhan Al-Nuaimi (United Arab Emirates) (*interpretation from Arabic*): It gives me pleasure, on behalf of the delegation of the United Arab Emirates, to express our appreciation to Ambassador Ka and the members of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People for their efforts and support with regard to the question of Palestine and the latest developments there.

Despite the fact that more than five decades have passed since the inclusion of the question of Palestine on the agenda of the General Assembly, the issue is still characterized by political complexity as one phase succeeds another — the logical result of the policies of illegal settlerist occupation conducted by Israel in order to achieve its own expansionist aspirations within the occupied Palestinian and Arab territories.

It is frustrating that, despite the fact that relevant General Assembly resolutions were adopted by a majority of votes on this issue, foremost among them resolution 181 (II) of 1947, on the partition of Palestine into two States, one Palestinian and the other Israeli, in addition to other resolutions reaffirming the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination and to establish their own State with its capital in Jerusalem, successive Israeli Governments have flagrantly violated their commitments. This attests without any doubt to the aspirations of Israel to remain as a Power of occupation that conducts its policies on the basis of settlement and expansion in the occupied territories, changing the historical, legal and demographic character of the land at the expense of the original Arab inhabitants and committing one violation after another in the Holy City of Jerusalem, which has a history and a culture of religious tolerance, coexistence and peace.

The peace process was launched in Madrid in 1991, based on resolutions of international legitimacy and on the principle of land for peace. The Arab States have chosen this strategic option in order to establish a peaceful, just and lasting solution to the question of Palestine and to the problems in the Middle East. That process has enjoyed the unconditional support of the entire international community.

Regrettably that march for peace has encountered clear obstacles deliberately placed in its path by the

Israeli authorities through guidelines and actions that run counter to the letter, spirit and provisions of the agreements that have been reached with the Palestinian Authority. The most dangerous of these obstacles takes the form of repeated attempts to renege on previous commitments or not to respect the time-frame for their implementation through continuation of the illegal settler and expansionist policies in the occupied territories, particularly in the Holy City of Jerusalem, as well as other dangerous practices such as detention, closures, violence, murder, confiscation of land and natural resources and rescinding the residency rights of indigenous Arab citizens.

All these actions have created a state of insecurity and instability in the occupied territories. Despite the welcoming by the international community of the Wye River Memorandum recently concluded in Washington, D.C., as another positive development aimed at reviving the peace process after two years of stagnation, we note with deep regret that the Israeli Government continues its attempts to shirk its responsibilities based on the provisions of that Memorandum through prevarication and procrastination, through delays in the implementation of the pledges it has made under the agreement. This is particularly so with regard to the release of all Palestinian political detainees, implementation of additional measures in the field of authority transfer, operation of the Palestinian infrastructure, redeployment in the West Bank and the cessation of all other unilateral activities aimed at imposing a fait accompli before the negotiations on the final status.

Of particular concern in this context is the permission granted by the Government of Israel for the formation of armed militias among the Jewish settlers, a matter which points up the Government's lack of concern for the consequences and its continuing consolidation of a state of occupation and settler activities.

Although we greatly appreciate the efforts made by the United States to lead the process to success, we look forward to the doubling of those efforts so as to force the Israeli Government to immediately cease all violations and to implement scrupulously all its political, legal and ethical commitments vis à vis the Palestinian people and its national Authority. This is in accordance with the time-frame agreed to in preparation for the negotiations on the final status, including Jerusalem, refugees, the settlements, the boundaries, security and the like, in a manner that would guarantee to the Palestinian people the exercise of its legitimate right to self-determination and to the declaration of establishment of its own independent State with its capital in Holy Jerusalem.

We believe that the unjust economic measures imposed by the Government of Israel every now and then on the Palestinian and Arab peoples within the occupied territories, including the economic embargo, restricting the freedom of movement of people and of goods and attempts to confiscate or destroy crops and other similar measures are a form of collective punishment. Such measures run counter to the provisions of international and humanitarian laws and the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War. We would therefore to call on the international community represented by the United Nations and its specialized agencies, as well as the sponsors of the peace process and other relevant parties, foremost among which is the European Union, to bring pressure to bear on the Israeli Government in order to put an immediate end to its continued violations, particularly now as the United Nations is preparing to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the Declaration on Human Rights.

We also call upon donor countries and the international development and financial institutions to promote all kinds of assistance, social and economic, to the Palestinian people in order to enable it to establish its own national institutions and realize its own sustainable development, improve its living conditions and the deteriorating state of its health-care and education systems, just like other peoples of world. International statistics reaffirm that the social and economic conditions of the Palestinian people were better at the beginning of the peace process than at present.

The peace process continues to face a stalemate on the Syrian and Lebanese tracks due to the intransigence of the Israeli Government and its refusal to implement all the commitments that were reaffirmed by relevant resolutions of international legitimacy on the basis of land for peace.

We support international efforts aiming at continuing the peace process on all its different tracks. Thus we call upon Israel to implement all its commitments, foremost of which is its full withdrawal from all occupied territories, including the Syrian Golan and southern Lebanon and to rescind all administrative measures deliberately adopted in order to annex the Syrian Arab Golan. Israel should also cease its other settler activities such as confiscation of land and water resources and the expulsion of Arab inhabitants. Furthermore, we urge the international community to double its efforts to press the Israeli Government to resume the negotiations unconditionally on those two tracks from the point where they ceased, based on the provisions of the Madrid Conference and on the principle of land for peace.

We would also like to call upon Israel to put an immediate end to the cycle of violence and indiscriminate bombing that is daily perpetrated against the villages of south Lebanon and the western Bekaa and to release all Lebanese detainees who have languished in its prisons for years for no crime other than defending themselves and their occupied territories, which are causes endorsed by the principles of international legitimacy.

Today, as the United Nations commemorates another International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, the United Arab Emirates reaffirms its support for the Palestinian people and its just struggle for self-determination and for the establishment of an independent State of its own with holy Jerusalem as its capital. We reaffirm that the only just, lasting and comprehensive solution is one based on the resolutions of international legitimacy, particularly Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978). Confidence-building measures should be undertaken, foreign occupation ended and the rule of law applied. Moreover, there must be action to resolve all pending problems in a legal and peaceful manner, through the elimination of all weapons of mass destruction, including nuclear weapons. Our goal must be the attainment of the aspirations of the States and peoples of the region to security, stability and sustainable development.

Mr. Gold (Israel): Nations arise over a certain land because of their historical experience, which preserves them as a distinct people over time, attaches them to a defined territory and allows them to be empowered with self-government. For centuries, the people of Israel were forcibly denied the latter quality of their nationhood. However, their connection with their land and with Jerusalem was never severed even as a succession of empires occupied Israel after the Roman legions of Vespasian and Titus thought they had put an end to Jewish political independence.

Indeed, the Jewish people's quest to actively recover their land never ceased. Self-government was restored, against all odds, in the year 132, in the year 351 and yet again in the year 614. The heroism of these struggles has left its mark on places like Betar, near Jerusalem, Gamla, in the Golan Heights, and Massada, over the Dead Sea.

The potentially destabilizing example of this incessant drive for human freedom and its universal message to all vanquished peoples prompted the Roman emperor Hadrian to forbid Jewish residence in Jerusalem, a law scrupulously followed by nearly all of his Byzantine successors. Furthermore, it was Hadrian who decided to rename the province of Judea as Syria-Palestine, with the purpose of erasing the memory of Jewish political independence forever.

But the memory could not be erased. Despite their forced eviction and dispersion, the Jewish people, across the centuries, streamed back to their homeland, limited only by the power of its imperial custodians to deny them access. Jewish centres were restored in Safed, Tiberias, Hebron and Jerusalem as Spanish Jewish exiles arrived in the sixteenth century. A Jewish plurality was restored to Jerusalem in the early nineteenth century, while a clear Jewish majority in Jerusalem was reached in the year 1864.

This historical experience cannot be divorced from the general debate over the Israeli-Palestinian question. For this debate, which today is focused on the respective rights of the parties in the disputed territories of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, cannot be based on the most recent General Assembly resolutions alone. The reality conveyed by the deliberate use of politically loaded adjectives in these resolutions reflect far more what United Nations bloc voting will sustain than what is historically true.

For example, the choice of terminology such as "occupied Palestinian territory" suggests a straightforward problem: that a sovereign Palestinian Arab state once existed; that Israel, like a European colonial Power, invaded its territory; and that now Israel must simply withdraw from that same territory to restore the Palestinian state. Indeed, PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat evoked to the General Assembly this fall

> "the need to realize justice for the Palestinian people, in order to regain their international status and their seat at the United Nations". (*A/53/PV.18, p. 13*)

Yet reality, according to the relevant international instruments governing this long conflict, is very different. The respective rights of the parties in the territory under dispute can only be understood if three basic sources are examined: the events surrounding decisions in 1947 and 1948, the aftermath of the Six-Day War, including

Security Council resolution 242 (1967), and finally the Oslo Agreements.

With the formal demise of the Ottoman Empire, the League of Nations, which was the source of international legitimacy in the first part of this century, acknowledged the absolute rights of the Jewish people to their land. In fact, in the Mandate for Palestine, the League of Nations confirmed that recognition had been given to the historical connection of the Jewish people with Palestine and to the grounds for reconstituting their national home in that country. Significantly, the League of Nations did not confer a right upon the Jewish people; it recognized a pre-existing right. That right, moreover, was preserved by its successor organization, the United Nations, which, in accordance with Article 80 of the Charter, established that nothing should be

> "construed ... to alter in any manner the rights whatsoever of any states or any peoples or the terms of existing international instruments to which Members of the United Nations may respectively be parties".

Thus, the United Nations did not revoke pre-existing rights or confer new rights of sovereignty when the advice of the General Assembly was sought in 1947 under Article 10 of the Charter. The recommendation came in the form of General Assembly resolution 181 (II) of 29 November 1947. While the national leadership of the Jewish community in British mandatory Palestine accepted the proposed partition plan, not only did the Arab Higher Committee and the Arab League members present categorically reject resolution 181 (II), but six countries later admitted the use of armed force to forcibly prevent its implementation.

After Israel declared its independence on 15 May 1948, it was in fact immediately invaded by these six armies, most of which had been supplied by the European colonial Powers: Egypt, joined by a Saudi contingent, advanced to Ashdod in the West and to the southern outskirts of Jerusalem in the East. The Lebanese and Syrian armies moved against Israel's North. The Iraqi army occupied western Samaria and reached Rosh Ha-Ayin, near Tel Aviv. Transjordanian forces nearly cut off Jerusalem from the coast and seized the eastern half of the city.

In the Old City of Jerusalem, the Jewish population was expelled, while 58 synagogues, including the Hurva Synagogue, built in 1267, were destroyed or desecrated. The United Nations regime for Jerusalem, set out in resolution 181 (II), did nothing for its people or for the protection of its holy sites. Only determined Israeli convoys broke Jerusalem's siege to supply food and water for thousands of the city's residents.

Had it not been for the armed rejection of resolution 181 (II), thousands of Israelis would not have lost their lives in the 1948 War of Independence. Had it not been for the determined invasion of the Arab States, the tragedy of the Palestinian Arab refugees during those same years would never have occurred.

As a result of the war, the Gaza Strip came under Egyptian military administration. In 1950 Jordan annexed the West Bank, an act recognized only by Great Britain and Pakistan. No demands to restore a Palestinian State were brought before the United Nations in the year that followed with respect to these territories that were under Egyptian and Jordanian occupation. Nevertheless, these developments completely changed the circumstances upon which the recommendations contained in resolution 181 (II) were based. In short, resolution 181 (II) was made moribund by the violent rejection of the Arab League, not by the decision of the State of Israel.

The most important of these new circumstances immediately became clear to Israel at the time. The struggle for the re-establishment of Jewish statehood was not just an inter-communal conflict between Jews and Arabs in what was once British Mandatory Palestine, but rather entailed the direct strategic involvement of the regular armies of the surrounding Arab States. This was underlined again within 20 years, in May 1967, when Israel's neighbours formed another coalition under Egyptian command, massing their armies along its borders in what they called then a war of annihilation. Again, Iraqi expeditionary forces swept across Jordan and prepared to cross into the West Bank as hostilities began on 5 June.

Israeli army units entered the West Bank during the Six Day War that followed for only one reason: Israel was attacked along this front with intense artillery bombardment that struck Jerusalem, Israeli airfields, such as Ramat David, and major cities. Jordanian ground units backed with heavy armour that were concentrated in the West Bank actually crossed the ceasefire lines set in 1949. Thus, Israel took control of territory from which it was attacked in a clear-cut war of defence.

The United Nations debate that followed the Six Day War reflected this fundamental fact, for Security Council resolution 242 (1967), which was adopted on 22 November 1967, laid down two critical principles that had to be applied in order to reach a just and lasting peace. First, reference to the withdrawal of Israeli armed forces from territories occupied in the recent conflict meant that Israel was not expected to pull out of all of the territories that it had entered. Secondly, the resolution explicitly acknowledged Israel's right to secure and recognized borders.

These two principles were complementary, since secure borders required mutually agreed territorial modifications. As United States Ambassador Arthur Goldberg told the Security Council on 15 November 1967,

> "Historically there have never been secure or recognized boundaries in the area. Neither the armistice lines of 1949 nor the cease-fire lines of 1967 have answered that description". (*Official Records of the Security Council, 1377th meeting, para. 65*)

A full Israeli withdrawal was clearly not envisioned. As George Brown, the British Foreign Secretary in 1967, subsequently told *The Jerusalem Post* on 23 January 1970,

> "The proposal said 'Israel will withdraw from territories that were occupied', and not from 'the' territories, which means that Israel will not withdraw from all the territories."

Resolution 242 (1967) clearly required a negotiation, underscored in resolution 338 (1973), to establish where these secure borders would be.

Yet today a disturbing anomaly is occurring. While the Security Council established in resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) that secure borders had to be negotiated between the parties, the General Assembly is predetermining the outcome of these proposed negotiations by defining the disputed territory as already being Palestinian. On the one hand, the United Nations has provided resolutions that have served as the basis for the Madrid Peace Conference and the Oslo accords. On the other hand, it is adopting resolutions in another body that undermine these very negotiations.

When Jordan relinquished its administrative ties to the West Bank on 31 July 1988, Israel could have proposed that it fill the vacuum by asserting its own claims of sovereignty. The rights of the Jewish people to the territories were, after all, embedded in the League of Nations mandate and were not altered by events surrounding United Nations resolution 181 (II). The aftermath of the Six Day War further reinforced this claim, since Israel entered the West Bank only in the exercise of its lawful right to self-defence, in contrast to the previous custodians. Fully aware of its historical and legal rights, Israel nonetheless opted for a process of negotiations to resolve the final status of these disputed territories, both through the 1991 Madrid Peace Conference and the Oslo agreements with the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO).

Israel has chosen the path of negotiations for two reasons. First, Israel is committed to reaching peace with its neighbours. Secondly, Israel is determined not to rule another people against their will. In fact, Oslo has led to a situation whereby 98 per cent of the Palestinians in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip are today under the administration of the Palestinian Authority, and not under the administration of Israel. But the fundamental underpinning of Oslo, as well as Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), is that issues be resolved only through negotiations between the parties. The Oslo II Interim Agreement is explicit in this regard:

> "Neither side shall initiate or take any step that will change the status of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip pending the outcome of the permanent status negotiations." (*article XXXI, para. 7*)

The clear intention of this language was to preclude the unilateral declaration of a Palestinian State or the unilateral annexation of West Bank or Gaza territory by Israel, for those are the only acts that could change the legal status of these disputed territories. This commitment was made again in the recently concluded Wye River Memorandum. In the United States letter of assurances to Israel dated 29 October 1998 that accompanied the Wye River agreement, the United States also took a strong position in this regard:

> "we are stressing that those who believe that they can declare unilateral positions or take unilateral acts, when the interim period ends, are courting disaster."

Despite these specific obligations contained in Oslo, PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat stated yesterday, 29 November 1998, that he plans to declare a Palestinian State on 4 May 1999. On the basis of such past declarations, the Government of Israel took the following decision on 11 November 1998, as it approved the Wye River Memorandum:

> "a unilateral declaration by the Palestinian Authority on the establishment of a Palestinian state, prior to the achievement of a Final Status Agreement, would constitute a substantive and fundamental violation of the Interim Agreement. In the event of such a violation, the Government would consider itself entitled to take all necessary steps, including the application of Israeli rule, law and administration to settlement areas and security areas in Judea, Samaria and Gaza, as it sees fit."

Should this chain of events occur this coming May, it should come as no surprise. For its part, Israel prefers the path of a negotiated settlement to the path of unilateralism. However, should Chairman Arafat carry out this declared intention to unilaterally establish a Palestinian State, Israel will do what is necessary to protect its security, including the assurance of defensible borders, to which it is fully entitled.

Mr. Diatta (Niger) (*interpretation from French*): Allow me at the outset, on behalf of my delegation, to convey to the Secretary-General and the Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People our deep satisfaction at the clear and comprehensive reports they have submitted on the question of Palestine.

As we are all aware, our Organization attaches high priority to this important question, which lies at the very heart of the Israeli-Arab conflict. Our consideration of it once again in the Assembly is taking place at a particularly crucial moment for the peace process begun in Madrid and translated into concrete terms by the historic Oslo accords.

It will be remembered that the Oslo accords gave rise to tremendous hopes for peace and security in the Middle East and were hailed by the entire international community as a major milestone in Israeli-Arab relations.

Unfortunately, the process quickly became deadlocked as a result of the refusal on the part of the Israeli Government to honour its commitments and of the unlawful measures it imposed on the occupied Palestinian territories, including Jerusalem. Those measures range from the establishment of new settlements to the confiscation of Arab lands and the sealing off of Palestinian territories. This untenable situation could not but prompt Palestinian and Israeli leaders and the sponsors of the peace process to take action.

That is why the international community placed all its hopes on the negotiations that took place in recent months and which culminated in the Wye River Memorandum on 23 October 1998. My Government welcomes the successful conclusion of these particularly difficult negotiations.

We are thus glad to take this opportunity to pay tribute here, on behalf of the Government and people of Niger, to the leading role played by the President of the United States and the King of Jordan not only in bringing about a resumption of the peace talks but also in the conclusion of the Wye River Memorandum, which breathed new life into the peace process.

We believe that at this crucial juncture for the peace process, to which I referred earlier, the two parties concerned must do their utmost to maintain the renewed momentum of the peace process and that they should continue to work within the framework of the Oslo accords. In so doing, they must in particular respect the commitments they have freely entered into and refrain from taking unilateral measures contrary to international law.

Likewise, we call on the two parties to work further to foster a climate of confidence and calm, a factor we deem vital to continued negotiations on questions that are still outstanding, in particular those relating to the final status of the occupied territories, including Jerusalem.

In concluding my remarks, I wish once again to reaffirm that as far as Niger is concerned, the future of peace in the Middle East hinges above all on the full realization of the legitimate and inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, namely the right to return to their homes and recover their property and the right to self-determination, independence and national sovereignty.

The achievement of those rights will contribute decisively to a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the Israeli-Arab conflict. Thus my delegation would like to express the hope that the General Assembly, which continues to bear full responsibility for the question of Palestine, will step up its efforts to ensure in the near future the achievement of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people and to work towards a successful conclusion to the peace process begun at Madrid and followed up at Oslo on the basis of resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978) and the principle of land for peace.

Mr. Hasmy (Malaysia): This year marks the fiftieth anniversary of Al-Nakba — the dispossession of the Palestinian people and the uprooting of hundreds of thousands of them from their land, homes and property. Today's debate on the question of Palestine is of particular significance, as it coincides with the commemoration of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. The commemoration of this auspicious occasion serves as a reminder to the international community, and this Organization in particular, of its continuing responsibility towards the Palestinian people in their quest for a just and lasting peace and security in their own homeland.

The signing of the Wye River Memorandum at Washington, D.C., on 23 October 1998 between the Chairman of the Palestinian Authority, Mr. Yasser Arafat, and the Israeli Prime Minister, Mr. Benjamin Netanyahu, was a welcome breakthrough in the stalled peace process. The courageous attitudes shown by both parties and the crucial role played by the Government of the United States, particularly President Clinton, in facilitating the signing of the peace agreement certainly deserve commendation. Equally deserving of our commendation was the valuable role of His Majesty King Hussein of Jordan. After almost two years of stalemate in the peace process, the Wye River Memorandum has revived hopes for lasting peace between the Israelis and Palestinians. Malaysia is gratified that the Palestinian people have celebrated the return of 13 per cent of their territory and the opening of the Gaza International Airport, yet another important symbol of Palestinian statehood and an important step towards the economic development of Palestine. The swift implementation of the interim peace agreement will certainly go a long way towards creating a conducive environment for the permanent status negotiations between the two parties.

Undoubtedly, the people of Palestine anxiously await the return of the rest of their land still under occupation. We therefore call on Israel to expeditiously withdraw from the remaining occupied Palestinian territory in order to fully realize the goals of the peace process.

While we welcome the political progress that has been made, the continuing adverse human rights situation and deteriorating socio-economic conditions of the Palestinian people in the occupied territories remain of major concern to the international community. The hardship and suffering that the Palestinians have endured over the years are well known and well documented. The living standards of Palestinians remain low, characterized by high unemployment, falling household incomes, overburdened infrastructure and restrictions on employment and mobility.

Only a comprehensive peace settlement will resolve the refugee issue. The provocative Israeli policies of confiscating Palestinian-owned lands on a massive scale and the demolition of Arab-owned houses, as well as the establishment of new Israeli settlements and the illegal expansion of existing ones in the occupied territories, have to be terminated forthwith. Given the fact that the peace process and the situation on the ground are interdependent and complementary to each other, the continued hardship faced by the Palestinian people does not augur well for the future of the Middle East peace process. The immediate amelioration of their plight is therefore an essential prerequisite to the further consolidation and promotion of the peace process.

For peace to flourish, progress in the search for a political settlement has to be accompanied by economic growth and development, in particular in the improvement of the socio-economic conditions of the Palestinians in the occupied areas. In order for peace and stability to prevail in the Middle East, it is essential that repressive and discriminatory policies and actions by the occupying Power be brought to an end immediately. Such policies should be replaced by serious and honest efforts to build trust and confidence, as well as social justice and mutual security among the parties concerned. The further and immediate release of Palestinians under detention would be a step in the right direction.

My delegation wishes to take this opportunity to reaffirm Malaysia's long-standing commitment and unwavering support for the Palestinian people and their leadership. We will continue to support them in their quest for the restoration of all their inalienable rights, in particular the rights to self-determination and to establish an independent and sovereign Palestinian State in their homeland. We are confident that the Palestinian Authority, under President Yasser Arafat, will steer the Palestinian people towards this end. It is the duty of the international community to assist the Palestinian leadership and people towards the early realization of that goal.

Mr. Sharma (India): As we celebrate the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, the international community today underlines its support for the people of Palestine in their quest for peace and justice and the realization of their legitimate goals and aspirations. We would like to reaffirm our solidarity with the people of Palestine and express India's principled and continuing support for their inalienable rights.

India's cherished bonds of friendship with the Palestinian people are based on civilizational links spanning almost every aspect of human endeavour — cultural, social, religious, economic and political. These links have been strengthened and reinvigorated with the passage of time. Since the time of Mahatma Gandhi, India's support for the Palestinian cause has been strong and unwavering. We have stood, and continue to stand, side by side with the people of Palestine in their struggle for the achievement of their just and legitimate national rights, which is the key to peace and stability in the Middle East. India's advocacy of the Palestinian cause is manifest in our continuous and consistent support of Palestinian issues in the United Nations and other international forums.

India has consistently advocated a peaceful solution to all disputes. The road to peace is often tortuous and strewn with impediments. What is imperative is the commitment of the parties concerned to a peaceful resolution of all outstanding problems. India has closely followed developments concerning the Middle East peace process. The signing of the Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements in September 1993, followed by the Interim Agreement on the West Bank and Gaza Strip two years later, and the Hebron accord of January 1997, were courageous initial steps by visionaries aiming to put an end to the saga of feuding and bloodshed and to usher in a new era of peace, stability and coexistence in the region, free of animosity and friction.

We welcome the Wye River Memorandum signed between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) last month. Notwithstanding the various difficulties that have emerged in the peace process, the commitment of the principal parties to pursue the goal of peace deserves to be commended. India has urged that unilateral action should be eschewed and has advocated faithful implementation of the Memorandum, signed in Washington. As Prime Minister Shri Atal Behari Vajpayee stated in his message on the occasion of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, India believes that the Memorandum will improve the quality of life of the Palestinian people and pave the way to the commencement of final status negotiations so that a just, lasting and comprehensive peace can be achieved in the region on the basis of the principle of land for peace and the relevant United Nations resolutions. Former adversaries can one day become partners in the cause of peace.

There is a general recognition that, together with political support for the peace process, there is need to focus on the multifaceted tasks of nation-building. The fledgling Palestinian Authority requires generous assistance, particularly in the fields of health, education and creation of employment. Infrastructural development is an area of critical importance. The challenges confronting the people of Palestine are also challenges for the international community and merit its urgent attention and support. Regional cooperation, complemented by international efforts, is an essential prerequisite for enhancing peace and prosperity in the region.

India will continue, within our resource constraints, to extend material and technical assistance to the people of Palestine to consolidate their progress towards self-government and nation-building. We seek to assist the Palestinian people through scholarships and exchange programmes. We offered more than 50 specialized training slots in 1996-97 at an estimated cost of 5.5 million rupees. India also pledged $1 million at the Washington Donors Conference in October 1995 and another $1 million at the subsequent pledging conference in Paris in January 1996.

These pledges are being utilized both for the provision of goods and for undertaking projects in the Palestinian National Authority territory. We have also offered to set up a common facility centre for imparting training in vocational activities such as software development, computer programming and computerized numerically controlled machines. India has also been contributing to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) and has given Rs 225,000 for 1998.

While the international community must assist in realizing the cherished objective of peace and prosperity in the region, the actual impetus for a permanent and lasting solution will have to come from the parties themselves. The recent success in charting a course through the minefield of stillborn initiatives and hurdles once again rekindles hope. We trust that the wisdom and sagacity displayed, resulting in a momentum towards peaceful and mutually beneficial coexistence, will continue to guide future negotiations. We trust in a successful and just outcome.

The meeting rose at 5.50 p.m.

United Nations A/53/PV.74

General Assembly
Fifty-third Session

74th plenary meeting
Tuesday, 1 December 1998, 10 a.m.
New York

Official Records

President: Mr. Opertti . . . . (Uruguay)

The meeting was called to order at 10.50 a.m.

Agenda item 39 *(continued)*

Question of Palestine

Report of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People (A/53/35)

Report of the Secretary-General (A/53/652)

Draft resolutions (A/53/L.48, A/53/L.49, A/53/L.50, A/53/L.51)

Mr. Pham Quang Vinh (Viet Nam): It is my honour to address the Assembly on agenda item 39, entitled "Question of Palestine".

The United Nations is today commemorating the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, a day that reminds us of the plight of a people that has been suffering for so long.

It is half a century since the Palestinian people was dispossessed of its homes and lands, which calls for strengthened solidarity with, and support for, the Palestinian people.

The question of Palestine is at the core of the situation in the Middle East. While the Middle East peace process is ongoing, it has proved to be a long and arduous one.

My delegation appreciates the report of the Secretary-General on the question of Palestine and on the situation in the Middle East contained in document A/53/652.

We welcome the progress achieved since the signing of the Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements and, in particular, the recent signing of the Wye River Memorandum between Palestine and Israel as a promising development. We hope that this Memorandum will complement the agreements reached between the parties and enable them to move further forward in their negotiations, including on the issue of permanent status.

We note with concern, however, that difficulties still continue. It is therefore imperative that the agreements already reached between the parties concerned be implemented in good faith and the commitments made be upheld. As the peace process goes on, this will build confidence and create an environment conducive to further progress.

The General Assembly and the Security Council have considered the situation in the occupied Arab territories on a number of occasions during the course of this year and last year, as a matter of urgency. The issue of settlements has been considered to be an obstacle to the peace process that must be overcome.

The Security Council met on this subject in June this year and later issued a presidential statement on 13 July 1998 (S/PRST/1998/21).

This record contains the original text of speeches delivered in English and interpretations of speeches delivered in the other languages. Corrections should be submitted to original speeches only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and be sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned, *within one month of the date of the meeting*, to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, Room C-178. Corrections will be issued after the end of the session in a consolidated corrigendum.

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The General Assembly convened its tenth emergency special session last year and adopted resolutions ES-10/2, ES-10/3, ES-10/4 and ES-10/5, in calling for, *inter alia*, the convening of a Conference of the High Contracting Parties to the Geneva Convention on measures to enforce the Convention in the Occupied Palestinian Territory.

From this rostrum, my delegation reaffirms further its strong and consistent support for, and solidarity with, the Palestinian people in their just cause. The question of Palestine requires a comprehensive, just and lasting solution. This solution must ensure the restoration of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, including the right to return and to statehood.

We hope that the recent progress will give impetus to the peace process and that the agreements reached will be fully implemented. The parties concerned should overcome the existing obstacles to achieve a just and durable peace in the Middle East on the basis of ensuring the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, as well as the legitimate interests of the parties concerned.

At this juncture, the United Nations will continue to play an important role, especially in the mobilization of international support for and assistance to the Palestinian people.

In this regard, we commend in particular the contributions made by the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People. We also highlight the role of the Department of Public Information and the Division for Palestinian Rights, which should be further strengthened.

My delegation welcomes the adoption by the General Assembly of resolution 52/250 on the participation of Palestine in the work of the United Nations. We earnestly look forward to the day when Palestine will enjoy full membership in this Organization.

Mr. Mesdoua (Algeria) (*interpretation from Arabic*): Yesterday we attended the large-scale meeting in commemoration of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, which was also attended by the representative of the Secretary-General, the President of the General Assembly, the President of the Security Council and many other delegations representing the Governments and peoples of the world. Such a gathering expressed the unanimous recognition of the international community of its responsibilities towards the question of the Palestinian people, whose long ordeal began with the imposition of the British Mandate on its sovereignty and its destiny in the Middle East region.

It was not enough for the colonial Power to launch such transgression against the rights of the Palestinian people: it made that transgression worse when it issued the infamous Balfour Declaration in 1917.

The crisis was further compounded, reaching its peak when the General Assembly recognized and endorsed the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 on the usurped territory of Palestine under international circumstances of inequality. That year, 1948, was also the year when the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was promulgated. Since that time the tragedy of the Palestinian people has been exacerbated and disasters have been inflicted on the Palestinian people one after another, ranging from a wave of annihilation, mass murder, deportation and expulsion of citizens from their land and from their homes, making them a diaspora of displaced refugees living in camps without shelter.

The launching of the peace process at the Madrid Conference in 1991 was the source of new hope and optimism with regard to reaching a lasting, just and comprehensive settlement of the Israeli-Arab conflict as a whole. The case of that conflict is the question of the Palestinian people, which is based on international legitimacy, particularly Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978), and is basically focused on the principle of land for peace.

The majority of Arab countries participated in the Conference in good faith: both the parties concerned and other Arab countries that stand united with them, including Algeria. This was because we believe it necessary to give the peace effort a historic chance to achieve a final resolution of the problem and to avert war in the region. But this hope did not last long. For after the peace process had made some progress, particularly on the Palestinian track, after the signing of the Oslo and Washington accords in 1993, a climate of confrontation soon prevailed in the region again when the Israeli extremist right took power, ignoring all the achievements that had been made previously, and stating its desire not to pursue the peace process. It even set aside the principle of land for peace, which had been the very foundation of the peace process.

The situation continued to deteriorate when the Israeli Administration decided to resume its settlerist policy in the occupied Palestinian territories and to go to extremes in encouraging Jewish settlers to commit acts of provocation against Palestinian citizens and to confiscate their land.

A few weeks ago, the world felt new hope that the peace process would again be revived, when Israel, under pressure from the international community, returned to the negotiating table and, along with the Palestinian Authority, signed the Wye River Memorandum, which, in fact, is nothing but an implementation measure to carry out a previous agreement on the withdrawal of the Israeli army of occupation from certain occupied Palestinian territories. The implementation of that agreement had been suspended for more than 18 months because of the intransigence of the Israeli Administration.

But those hopes were again shattered, because Israel is still working hard to strip the peace process of any substance and thus to convert it into a protracted scheme of manipulation, procrastination, and prevarication, using the flimsiest of pretexts to avoid fulfilling the obligations it undertook *vis-à-vis* the Palestinian side. More than that, Israel has deliberately and publicly turned its back on the spirit of the most recent agreement. The best example of this is its explicit avowal that it will continue to pursue its settlements policy, ignoring all other considerations, by establishing new Jewish settlements in the Palestinian territories and by expanding existing settlements. This runs counter to the letter and the spirit of the principles of international legitimacy and of all the agreements that have been signed with the Palestinian side.

Like every other session, the fifty-third session will come to an end with the Assembly having adopted a number of important resolutions affirming the legitimate and inalienable rights of the Palestinian people. As they do every year, these resolutions — like all other resolutions, including those of the Security Council — will remain dead letters. The evolving situation in occupied Palestine would not have reached this stage of deterioration had the international community demonstrated determination and will to put an end to Israel's stubborn pursuance of the policy of defying the resolutions of international legitimacy on the Middle East in general, and on Palestine in particular.

The United Nations responsibility towards the Palestinian people will remain intact so long as the question of Palestine is without a just and final solution guaranteeing the Palestinians all the rights that are recognized for all other peoples including the right to establish its own independent State, with holy Jerusalem as its capital.

In this connection, Algeria welcomed the resolution adopted at the fifty-second session enhancing the representation of Palestine in the General Assembly and enabling Palestine to participate more fully in the work of the United Nations. In our view, that was a very important first step, which must be followed by further steps towards full membership of the State of Palestine in this international forum.

The resolution of the question of Palestine is an integral part of a comprehensive resolution of the entire question of the Middle East. Every attempt to achieve a just peace in the region must include the imperative of ending Israeli occupation and of bringing about Israeli withdrawal from all occupied Arab territories, including the Syrian Golan and southern Lebanon, in conformity with resolutions of international legitimacy, in particular Security Council resolutions 425 (1978) and 497 (1981). As far as Algeria is concerned, this is the only serious option for the Israeli Administration. It would ensure the return of the Arab territories to their legitimate owners, would avert war in the region, and would create an atmosphere of confidence leading to the establishment of a just, lasting and comprehensive peace that would enable all the peoples of the region to live in security.

Mr. De Saram (Sri Lanka): The subject of Palestine has been on the agenda of the United Nations in one form or another for the past 50 years. For the realization by the Palestinian people of their inalienable national rights, I have the honour today to reaffirm Sri Lanka's wholehearted support.

Those in a position to do so endeavour tirelessly to move all concerned towards the ultimate goal of a just, comprehensive and lasting peace, this most recently in October at the very impressive Wye River meeting, under the auspices of and with the essential and determined participation of the United States.

Meanwhile, it has been one of the principal and continuing responsibilities of the United Nations to keep the political, economic and social circumstances of the Palestinians of the occupied territories in the public eye. This is a responsibility that the General Assembly in particular has discharged conscientiously and discharged well, principally through the Assembly's Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, whose report is before the General Assembly today. To the Chairman of the Committee, the Permanent Representative of Senegal, Ambassador Ibra Ka, and to the Committee as a whole, I convey great appreciation for the work the Committee has done and for the report the Committee has presented to the General Assembly.

The Committee tells in its report of the conditions in which the Palestinians of the occupied territories live. The report of the Committee speaks at length and with emphasis of the magnitude of some of the problems the Palestinians of the occupied territories experience each day, problems which in fundamental ways are disruptive of Palestinian life and of Palestinian lands. These include the very major problem of settlements established in the occupied territories contrary to international legal requirements. And there are other difficulties as well, affecting, it would seem, nearly all important aspects of Palestinian life, to which the report of the Committee calls the Assembly's attention with serious and urgent concern.

There is the violence — violence that is deplorable, whatever the circumstances and by whomever caused — when the overall objective must be and has to be reconciliation in peace.

Then, against this almost overwhelmingly grey, depressing and even threatening background came the Wye River Memorandum of October, with its vision and skill, its determination, its courage and its statesmanship. It is most welcome at the present time and most extraordinary in its significance for what can be if there is cooperation where there is now antagonism, friendship where there is now hostility.

Yet we have still the admonition of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, made in the final chapter of its report in the course of its conclusions and recommendations, reminding us that great care needs to be taken of the Palestinian people in the occupied territories pending the realization of a final settlement.

Of relevance in that regard is the observation made by the Secretary-General in his report of 10 November 1998 to the General Assembly (A/53/652) that the Wye River Memorandum offers the Palestinian people economic opportunities that are essential if there is to be peace. The Secretary-General promises that the United Nations system will continue to support progress in the Israeli-Palestinian talks and provide economic, social and other assistance to the occupied territories.

Of relevance as well are the expressions of great generosity on the part of donor Governments towards the Palestinian people, which the General Assembly has heard expressed yesterday and today and for which, of course, warm appreciation must always be recorded.

The delegation of Sri Lanka joins in the hope expressed by so many yesterday and today that with the additional momentum provided by Wye and the cooperation and goodwill it could engender, a path will eventually be found to a just, comprehensive and lasting peace for all the peoples of the region.

Mr. Osei (Ghana): As the world marks the fiftieth anniversary of the forcible dispossession of the Palestinian people of their lands, homes and property, the international community's concerns over the slow progress of the peace process have been assuaged by recent positive developments, which culminated in the signing of the Wye accord on 23 October 1998.

Consequently, my delegation aligns itself with the unanimous expression of profound satisfaction with the accord, which signifies a restoration of mutual trust among the negotiating parties, thereby infusing a fresh impetus into the quest for a negotiated settlement of the Palestinian issue. We commend the laudable efforts of all parties, notably those of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat, President Clinton and King Hussein.

The Wye Memorandum has so far received only a cautious response from most Governments in the Middle East, particularly the Palestinians. The pessimism among Arabs stems from the long history and heritage of prolonged stalemates, reversals and prevarication that has inhibited the implementation of previous agreements.

A major threat to the current accord is the violent activities of extremist elements in both Israel and Palestine, whose primary objective is to scuttle the peace process. In this context, my delegation condemns the recent botched attack on Israeli schoolchildren, which led to the death of an Israeli soldier. Coming just after the signing of the Wye Memorandum, the attack was designed to subvert the peace process. As stated by the President of Ghana, Flight-Lieutenant Jerry John Rawlings, in the General Assembly recently,

> "Terrorist acts, in particular, are totally unacceptable as a means of seeking redress for any grievance, achieving political ends or supporting a cause." *(A/53/PV.9, p.6)*

Further acts of this kind cannot be ruled out. It is the conviction of my delegation that they should strengthen rather than weaken the resolve of the parties to proceed with the peace process. It is against this background that my delegation welcomes the prompt reaction of the Palestinian Authority to rein in the activities of suspected groups, an unequivocal demonstration of its commitment to the implementation of the Wye agreement and the entire peace process.

Similarly, we note with appreciation the Israeli Government's approval of the agreement and its subsequent withdrawal of Israeli troops from the town of Qabatiya — the first of three envisioned phased withdrawals of Israeli troops — and the release of 250 Palestinian prisoners. Also worth noting is the opening of a new Palestinian airport in Gaza. We urge the two partners to maintain the prevailing spirit of trust and compromise.

While the Memorandum has guaranteed a new momentum in the peace process, other thorny issues remain unresolved, including the future of Jerusalem, the return of Palestinian refugees and the release of all imprisoned Palestinians.

My Government reiterates its unwavering support for the inalienable right of the Palestinian people to establish an independent sovereign homeland with Jerusalem as its capital. The right of Palestinians to a State does not stem from the existing agreements, but is congruous with the Charter of the United Nations and established positions of the international community.

To that end, we regret the decision of the Government of Israel on 21 June 1998 to institute further measures to expand the jurisdiction and planned boundaries of Jerusalem. The underlying objective of the greater Jerusalem umbrella municipality, which includes settlements in the West Bank, is to link and strengthen the Jewish majority in the area. The decision is all the more regrettable because it is inconsistent with the spirit and the letter of the Oslo and Madrid peace accords.

Since the acquisition of territory by force is wrong under international law and infringes the Charter of the United Nations, my delegation reaffirms its opposition to Israel's illegal occupation of East Jerusalem and the establishment of other settlements on Palestinian lands and regards these as impediments to the peace process.

The continued deterioration of the socio-economic conditions of the Palestinian population are also a matter of grave concern. The plight of the Palestinians is aggravated by the frequent imposition of curfews and closures of the Gaza Strip by the Israeli authorities. The economic desperation of the Palestinians is reflected in their lukewarm response to the Wye accord.

To attain a durable peace, there must be economic development and improvement in the quality of life of the Palestinian people. We therefore welcome the decision of the Israeli Government and the Palestinian Authority to conclude an agreement on the establishment of an industrial estate at Karni in Gaza. This would help alleviate the plight of Palestinians by employing 40,000 workers. However, it needs to be stressed that the economic viability of the project ultimately depends on the cooperation of Israeli customs and security officials who control access through Israel to foreign markets.

In this regard, we also commend the efforts of the Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) for his lucid report on the Agency's activities. UNRWA provides basic humanitarian assistance, such as education, health care, relief assistance and social services, to the refugees. Its peace implementation programme, which provides loans to small businesses, has enabled the refugees to participate in income-generating schemes. It is however regrettable that UNRWA's laudable efforts are being impeded by the financial difficulties that have compelled the agency to curtail some of its services, despite the deplorable living standards in the refugee camps. Consequently, we commend the donors that provided an additional contribution of $21 million in response to an appeal by the Agency in September 1997, and we reiterate our appeal to Member States, organizations and individuals to emulate this laudable gesture and contribute generously to the Agency to enable it to execute its programme of activities.

My delegation is equally concerned about policies and practices of the Israeli Government that clearly infringe the basic tenets of international humanitarian law, in particular the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, of 12 August 1949, and the international standards of human rights, in particular the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenants on Human Rights.

How can we justify a deliberate policy of land expropriation; restrictions with respect to land, housing and water; environmental damage through improper waste disposal from settlements; burial of atomic waste on occupied lands; harassment of women, children and students; removal of persons from their homes and demolition of homes; separation of families and even spouses; unfair arrests, detention, torture, trial and imprisonment without due legal representation or respect for the basic principles of justice; and restrictions on movement within and from occupied lands and on re-entry into them.

My delegation believes that exigencies of national security can hardly justify such abuses, since the prevailing environment of insecurity in the Middle East is a direct consequence of these policies and practices.

The Wye accord should not exist in isolation; it should be the basis for reactivating the entire Middle East peace process for the attainment of a just, comprehensive and durable peace in the region. The Syrian and Lebanese tracks, in this connection, are indispensable links in any comprehensive settlement. Israel's continued occupation of portions of Lebanese territory constitutes an impediment to comprehensive peace in the region. Needless to say, guarantees of peace and security can be attained only through cooperation and cordial relations based on mutual respect for each other's sovereignty and territorial integrity. My delegation consequently supports Lebanon's insistence that Israel implement all provisions of the Security Council resolutions on the issue.

Similarly, Israel's withdrawal from the Golan Heights would attest to its sincerity and its desire to achieve a just, comprehensive and lasting peace. While urging Israel and Syria to resume negotiations on the issue, we believe that progress will be encouraged by the withdrawal of Israeli forces from the Golan Heights and its return to Syria.

Finally, my delegation is convinced that comprehensive peace and security will be achieved only through the full implementation of all relevant General Assembly and Security Council resolutions, notably Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978).

Mr. Al-Shammam (Yemen) (*interpretation from Arabic*): Yesterday we commemorated the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People by reaffirming the inalienable right of the Palestinian people to self-determination and to the establishment of their own independent State on all their occupied territory.

The problem of Palestine is not a new question for this Organization. It is at the heart of the Middle East conflict. The General Assembly has dealt with this question over the last five decades and has adopted many resolutions that have not yet been implemented.

What distinguishes this session from other sessions is that the issue has undergone certain positive mutations, through the implementation of the Wye accord and the Declaration of Principles through the partial withdrawal of Israeli troops from the occupied Palestinian territories. In this regard, my delegation has welcomed the Declaration of Principles and the subsequent agreements, as well as all of the positive steps that have taken place in accordance with the principle of land for peace. We welcome in particular the bilateral agreements concerning the implementation of the Declaration of Principles regarding the West Bank, Gaza, the partial withdrawals from Hebron and the West Bank and the extension of Palestinian governance as a step towards the final goal of the establishment of the Palestinian state on Palestinian territory, with Jerusalem/Al-Quds as its capital.

We welcome as well the most recent agreement for a 13 per cent withdrawal from the West Bank territories. We thank the United States for its unceasing efforts in this regard — efforts to allow the Palestinian people to enjoy their right to self-determination and to expand the authority of their Government over the entire Palestinian territory.

My delegation reaffirms the importance of achieving speedy progress towards a final settlement leading to consecrating the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people, in particular their right to self-determination and to the establishment of an independent State with its capital at Al-Quds — in accordance with United Nations resolutions, international legitimacy and the basic principles of the Madrid Peace Conference, the Oslo accords and subsequent arrangements.

In addition, we urge the sponsors of the peace process and the international community to make all possible efforts to implement the agreements that have been reached between the two parties immediately and meticulously, including the withdrawal of Israeli forces from the territories occupied since 1967. Furthermore, my delegation would like to stress the importance of finding a solution to the problem of Palestinian refugees, the dismantling of the settlements that were established after 1967 and the abstention from changing the status of Al-Quds, which by prior agreement, has been postponed to a later date. We also appeal to States to respect the relevant Security Council resolutions.

On the other hand, my delegation appeals to the international community in general to provide due assistance to the Palestinian National Authority to enable it to cope with its responsibilities as regards combating the poverty and unemployment that have resulted from the occupation and to provide economic and social assistance allowing the Palestinian people to build its economic and social institutions. This would have a positive effect on the restoration of peace and security in the region.

My delegation asks that the United Nations play a more active role, a role of a broader scope, in the present peace process and in the implementation of the Declaration of Principles. In addition, the United Nations, has a permanent responsibility towards the question of Palestine until such time as it is finally resolved in all its aspects and in a just and comprehensive manner, in accordance with the resolutions of international legitimacy.

Mr. Yel'chenko (Ukraine): Among the dozens of present-day unsettled disputes that have an unfavourable impact on international peace and security, the question of Palestine — the core of the Arab-Israeli conflict — is rated as the most complicated and sensitive one. For decades, the United Nations and the international community at large have been undertaking strenuous efforts to resolve this conflict. Regrettably, this objective remains unrealized, although it does not seem to be unattainable.

The course of events of the past year, and especially those of the past few weeks, give us some encouragement. Thanks to persistent international mediatory efforts, in particular those of the United States, as well as to the political will and the sense of responsibility of the parties involved, we have witnessed a real breakthrough in a deadlock situation in the negotiating process that had lasted for almost 19 months. Ukraine joined the international community in welcoming the signing on 23 October 1998 of the Wye River Memorandum. In its statement on this event, distributed as an official document of the General Assembly at this session, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine stressed, in particular, that in our country the conclusion of this agreement was perceived as evidence that even the most complicated and protracted conflicts can and should be settled by peaceful means through negotiations.

We are also much gratified by the fact that despite the attempts by radical forces on both sides to block the implementation of the Wye Memorandum, its ratification by the Israeli Knesset on 17 November made it possible for this important document to start working. In this context, we welcome the start of the permanent status negotiations, as well as the first further redeployment of Israeli troops from parts of the West Bank. We believe that a spirit of compromise and political wisdom, as well as mutual compliance with their previous commitments, will lead the parties to the full and speedy implementation of the Memorandum and bring closer a comprehensive resolution of the whole issue.

At the same time, our country is deeply alarmed by the fact that abhorrent terrorist activities in the region have not ceased and continue to undermine the fragile peace process, victimizing the innocent civilian population. In view of the most recent terrorist attacks, I would like again to record Ukraine's strong condemnation of any acts of terrorism by whomsoever committed and whatever their motivations may be. We believe that the full implementation by the parties of all security provisions outlined in the Wye Memorandum, especially in outlawing and combating terrorist organizations, is vitally important to this end.

It is evident that both sides should demonstrate restraint and tolerance. Only on this basis can we expect further movement in the right direction. We encourage the parties to stick to the path of negotiations leading to a comprehensive and just settlement of the Palestine question, which can be achieved only on the basis of implementation by the parties of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), including the principle of land for peace, and in accordance with the bilateral agreements signed to date.

With regard to the issue of settlement construction activities, as well as of Jerusalem, Ukraine shares the relevant assessment given by the participants in the open debate held in the Security Council on 30 June and joins the call addressed to the Israeli Government in the statement by the President of the Security Council of 13 July 1998 (S/PRST/1998/21) not to proceed with these activities and not to pre-empt the outcome of the permanent status negotiations, including the most sensitive issue of Jerusalem.

Apart from this, Ukraine favours the implementation of recommendations contained in the resolutions of the tenth emergency special session of the General Assembly, with a view to convening a conference of the High Contracting Parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention.

However, in our view, the timing of this conference should be considered very carefully in order not to hamper the course of the present negotiations and the redeployment process now under way.

Our delegation remains convinced that the United Nations, which is to a large extent the original initiator of settling the question of Palestine, should continue to shoulder its primary responsibility for ensuring the exercise by the Palestinian people of its inalienable rights, including the right to self-determination and its own statehood. This world Organization should remain a principal guarantor of international legitimacy with respect to the question of Palestine and a major headquarters of international support of and assistance to the Palestinian people.

Undoubtedly, any effort to achieve a peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine should take into account the urgent need for social and economic development in the Palestinian territory. In this respect, we think that priority attention should be given to the joint Palestinian-Israeli economic projects aimed at facilitating economic growth and stability in those lands.

Ukraine commends the efforts of the international donor community and the United Nations family of organizations in providing substantial and tangible assistance to the Palestinian people and stands ready for closer economic cooperation with it on both a bilateral and a multilateral basis.

In this context, we are gratified by the results of the donors Conference to Support Middle East Peace and Development held yesterday in Washington, D.C., at which some $3 billion was pledged in assistance to the Palestinian Authority for a variety of development projects.

We note with satisfaction the further development of Ukrainian-Palestinian bilateral relations over the past year, including the first visit to Ukraine of the delegation of the Palestinian Legislative Council, as well as a number of important high-level meetings held at different international forums and in the Palestinian territories. During all those meetings, prospects were broadly addressed for joint projects with Ukraine's involvement in developing the industrial infrastructure of the Palestinian territory and providing educational training for the Palestinians. We hope that all of those projects will be finalized and soon come into effect.

In conclusion, I would like to reconfirm Ukraine's strong interest in the settlement of the question of Palestine. People in Ukraine are very hopeful that in the near future the time will come when the United Nations will turn the last page in the long history of this issue, once the rights of the Palestinian people have been fully realized.

Mr. Kpotsra (Togo)(*interpretation from French*): If there are issues around which national public opinion forms a judgement as to the role and efficacy of the United Nations, the question of Palestine, which is at the heart of the Israeli-Arab crisis and which has had the attention of the entire world for half a century, is certainly one of them. This is a gauge of the great importance of the debate to which this issue regularly gives rise, a debate that only articulates the keen concerns felt by the international community in this regard.

Thus it was last year that the General Assembly adopted resolution 52/52 by an overwhelming majority, whereby it recalled that the settlement of the question of Palestine must be based on abidance by certain fundamental principles of international law and of the United Nations Charter, as well as the implementation of agreements made.

A year later, we are compelled to note that the peace process in the Middle East has long been stalled and that no substantive progress has been made in the implementation of the recently concluded agreements. The situation on the ground, including the economic situation and the living conditions of the Palestinian people, continues to deteriorate. Moreover, millions of Palestinians continue to live in precarious conditions in refugee camps. They are enduring the adverse consequences of Israel's stepped-up occupation policies and practices, which not only constitute a serious violation of the provisions of the Fourth Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, of 12 August 1949, and of pertinent Security Council resolutions, but also run counter to the peace process begun in Madrid and to subsequent agreements.

To be sure, despite everything, the international community has made tireless efforts in pursuit of this process. In this vein, my delegation thanks the Secretary-General for his initiatives to defend and promote the rights of the Palestinian people and especially welcomes the assistance offered by the Organization to the Palestinian people in the economic and social spheres. We also wish to praise the work of the Committee on the

Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, which has striven to rally the international community in support of a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the question of Palestine.

The adoption by the General Assembly on 18 November of a resolution entitled "Bethlehem 2000" was yet another clear signal of the international community's determination to contribute in every way possible to restoring peace to the region. There is no doubt that making the Bethlehem 2000 project a reality will encourage the pursuit of the peace process and reconciliation.

If it is to be viable and lasting, peace in the Middle East must rest on the solid foundations of justice, respect for human rights and humanitarian law, and relations based on the principles of equality and partnership between neighbours. Above all, however, this long-sought peace must follow the cessation of the unilateral measures that have jeopardized the peace process for far too long. It also depends on the rigorous and good-faith implementation of commitments undertaken and on the determination of the parties to avoid recourse to one-upmanship and to reject all reckless and extremist moves.

That is why the Government of Togo strongly welcomes the United States initiatives that led to the signing of the Wye River Memorandum. Unquestionably, the Memorandum represents a fresh start to the peace process, to which it has given new impetus that we must maintain and strengthen at all costs.

More than ever before, the sponsors of the peace process, the Security Council and the entire international community must do all they can steadfastly and sustainedly to support the process. The ultimate goal, need we recall, includes not only the recognition of the right of all States of the region, including Israel, to live in peace within secure and internationally recognized borders, but also and especially the establishment of an independent Palestinian State.

The United Nations ongoing responsibility, which it must bear until a satisfactory settlement based on international law can be reached, also requires the Organization's role in the Middle East peace process to be expanded and strengthened. From the same perspective, and in the interests of peace and security throughout the Middle East region, we hope that the Israeli Government will show the same determination to settle the issues of southern Lebanon and the Syrian Golan that we would have it focus on the question of Palestine. It is obvious that peace and reconciliation cannot be achieved in the region so long as the policies and practices currently in effect in southern Lebanon are pursued and the Golan has not been returned to Syria.

The agreement that emerged from the Wye Plantation meetings has rekindled a semblance of hope for a settlement of the question of Palestine and, on that basis, of the Israeli-Arab crisis as a whole. Indeed, the agreement has opened the door to final status negotiations. If the impetus it has given to the peace process is to be maintained, the parties must exercise enormous restraint and much self-discipline throughout the dealings ahead.

As an eminent statesman said a few days ago said before the Representative Council of Jewish Institutions in France:

> "In opening these negotiations, the two parties are embarking on a crossing which they know to be fraught with risk. There will certainly be squalls, perhaps storms. But they have no choice but to make the journey. Reconciliation, peace, real security and economic development await them on the far shore."

Mr. Insanally (Guyana): Unlike past occasions when we have met to consider the question of Palestine, there is this time a prevailing sense of cautious optimism about its eventual resolution. The Wye River Memorandum that was signed in Washington, D.C., on 23 October 1998 by the Prime Minister of Israel and the President of the Palestinian Authority has given the peace process a new momentum towards progress.

At the end of October, an expert meeting on the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949 took place in Geneva in response to the resolutions adopted at the meetings of the tenth emergency special session. Hopefully, as a result of those deliberations, we will now be able to convene a conference of the High Contracting Parties to the Convention. Most recently, in accordance with the Wye agreements, Israel happily withdrew more of its troops from the West Bank and, also as part of the overall agreement, the Palestinian airport in Gaza was finally opened, giving the Authority and the Palestinian people a further degree of self-determination and autonomy. Most encouraging is that, as a result of the Wye River Memorandum, final status talks between Israel and the Palestinian Authority are scheduled to commence in the near future.

The invigoration of the peace process has clearly brought renewed hope to the peoples of the Middle East and given them a chance finally to resolve matters that have bedeviled them, their region and the international community for 50 years. The Government of Guyana urges both Israel and the Palestinian Authority to fully implement not only the agreements reached at Wye last month, but also others which have been concluded over the years. Too much time has already been lost and too much is at stake to allow this very unique opportunity to dissipate. For this reason, any further attempt to halt the implementation of those agreements must be strongly condemned and discouraged by the international community. The United Nations, which has always been involved in this issue, must remain vigilant to ensure that the parties directly concerned work together to fulfil their joint obligations.

It is imperative now that appropriate machinery be put in place to address problems and misunderstandings that are likely to arise. The 19 months of stalemate prior to Wye showed that retreating into intransigence and making unilateral manoeuvres are counterproductive to the process. Both parties need to nurture the working relationship which they resuscitated at Wye and to preserve the spirit of goodwill and compromise that prevailed at that meeting. Constant and open communication between them will certainly help to sustain the peace process.

It may seem that all of this has been said before, but, given the protracted situation in the Middle East, reminders are often needed to keep the parties and, indeed, the international community focused on what has to be done to move things along. There is one requirement that should not be forgotten: the question of Palestine must be resolved through a just, comprehensive and definitive peace in the Middle East, and for this to be achieved, not only must the Palestinians be allowed to exercise their inalienable rights, but the disputes between Israel and Syria and Israel and Lebanon, which are linked to the core issue, must also be resolved. Accordingly, the talks between these parties need to be resumed in the context of Security Council resolution 242 (1967). The peace process is based significantly on the principle of land for peace. That principle cannot be overlooked or abandoned at any time.

As the search for the resolution of these issues continues, the Secretary-General's report on the item reminds us of the tragic plight of the Palestinian people. Despite several United Nations resolutions calling on Israel to cease its repression, that nation continues its settlement activities in Palestine and the occupied territories. Palestinian and other Arab lands and property are being constantly confiscated and many homes demolished daily. Thousands of Palestinians remain imprisoned in Israel amid graphic reports of their torture and abuse. Now that the Government of Israel has expanded the boundaries of Jerusalem and created an umbrella municipality to administer it, it is feared that this development may serve to worsen the plight of the Palestinians. Very distressing, of course, is the negative impact on the Palestinian economy caused by closures of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip during the year, and by unremitting water shortages, which have affected agricultural production and the living conditions of the Palestinian people.

There is no doubt that as the Palestinians wait for a stable peace, their present circumstances require urgent attention. The international community must do all it can to alleviate the hardships to which the Palestinians continue to be exposed.

In commemorating our solidarity with their cause today, the Government and the people of Guyana are pleased to renew their pledge of full support. We believe that the Palestinian people will be ultimately successful in their struggle, since, as history has shown time and again, justice will in the end prevail over injustice.

Mr. Jele (South Africa): South Africa remains committed to the struggle of the Palestinian people to achieve self- determination and national independence.

My delegation believes that the settlement of the question of Palestine and the achievement of a just and comprehensive peace in the Middle East are interdependent processes. The materialization of endurable peace will require nothing less than the full restoration and recognition of the inalienable right of the Palestinian people to self-determination and the complete restoration of all Arab territories occupied since 1967.

In this context, it is worth recalling the decisions of the twelfth summit of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries, held in Durban in September 1998. The heads of State or Government of the countries of the Non-Aligned Movement reiterated their support for the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, including their right to return to their homeland and to have their own independent State with Jerusalem as its capital.

They also reiterated their demand for the withdrawal of Israel, the occupying Power, from all occupied Palestinian territory, including Jerusalem, and the other Arab territories occupied since 1967, and reaffirmed their position on occupied East Jerusalem, the illegal Israeli settlements and the applicability of the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949 to all the occupied Palestinian territory, including Jerusalem.

Despite the many provocations and violent actions on the part of those opposed to peace, the seemingly endless tragedy of lives wasted and deferred social and economic progress, the constant theme in negotiations, from Madrid through Oslo to Wye River, has been "land for peace". Therefore, attempts to replace the policy of land for peace with "security for peace" will invariably lead to increased tension and instability in the region and beyond.

South Africa welcomes the signing in Washington on 23 October 1998 of the Wye River agreement between Prime Minister Netanyahu and President Arafat. The Wye River process once again demonstrates that only through sustained dialogue will the path towards a comprehensive, just and equitable resolution of the question of Palestine and the Middle East conflict be made feasible.

But, as post-Wye River events have shown, such positive steps do not in and of themselves constitute a measure of sustained progress. This requires of the parties to the agreements the practical and honest implementation of decisions agreed upon. In this connection, South Africa would like to commend the Palestinian side's reaffirmation of its commitment to implement the provisions of the Wye River agreement and of all earlier agreements.

However, the conditional acceptance by the Israeli Government of the Wye River agreement and the apparent lack of political and moral commitment on its part to implement all of its obligations remains a disturbing trend.

We therefore call on the Israeli Government to desist from provocative acts and violations of the spirit and the letter of the accords and to cease the continued policies and practices relating to new Israeli settlements intended to alter the demographic reality. It is also a matter of grave concern that Palestinians continue to be subjected to repressive and restrictive measures affecting their free movement and economic activity.

We strongly condemn the perpetration of violent incidents designed to disrupt the positive impetus created after the Wye River agreement and reiterate our recent calls to all parties concerned not to allow acts of this nature, perpetrated by extremists, to derail the peace process.

My delegation, remaining hopeful that courageous and bold decisions will be taken to effect progress that will ultimately lead to peace in all areas, will vote in favour of the draft resolutions before us.

Mr. Elaraby (Egypt)(*interpretation from Arabic*): The world observes 30 November as a day of solidarity with the Palestinian people. This year the world commemorates the fiftieth anniversary of the beginning of Palestinian suffering — "the catastrophe", as the Palestinians call it — and the displacement and diaspora of millions of people. On 29 November 1947, the General Assembly adopted resolution 181 (II), which altered the face of history in the Middle East and divided Palestine into two States: a Jewish State and an Arab State for Christians and Muslims. The resolution also established an independent legal status for the city of Jerusalem.

The Jewish State was established within a few months of the adoption of the resolution. The declaration announcing its creation stated that it was established on the basis of the General Assembly resolution. Yet to date the Arab State has never come into being, for many reasons and because of circumstances the scope of which we could not cover in this statement. Fifty years have gone by, numerous wars have been fought and peace treaties have been signed. Yet the question of Palestine is still on the agenda of the General Assembly.

I believe that it is important to provide that background, the Palestinian question, enabling all of us to have a clear understanding about the primary role and the historical responsibility of the United Nations in this regard until a just, lasting and comprehensive settlement is reached. This will come about with the establishment of the State of Palestine.

Five decades after the beginning of the Arab-Israeli conflict, the international community realizes — now more than ever before — that the Palestinian question constitutes the core of this conflict. Without reaching a fair and lasting settlement of that question, the Middle East region, will, unfortunately, remain a region pervaded by tension and instability.

It is also important for the Israeli side to recognize that fact; no one should be under the illusion that temporary solutions can provide long-term peace or that partial agreements can be a substitute for a durable and comprehensive settlement of the Palestinian question.

The peace that we seek for our region is a peace that is comprehensive, lasting and just, one that will lead to the exercise by the Palestinian people of all of their natural rights, foremost among them the establishment of an independent state on their territory.

Mr. Filippi Balestra (San Marino), Vice-President, took the Chair.

After 19 years of procrastination, prevarication, and delay on the part of the Israeli Administration, on 23 October the Palestinian and Israeli sides signed a memorandum of understanding to implement a number of arrangements that were included in past transitional agreements. Egypt welcomes that agreement, the Wye River Memorandum, which resulted from a much-appreciated American effort, whereby a number of arrangements embodied in prior transitional agreements are to be implemented. Egypt welcomes the implementation of the Wye River Memorandum as well as of any other agreement that could be reached by the two sides. We hope that that agreement will be scrupulously implemented within its agreed time-frame. Egypt also stresses that other transitional arrangements must be finalized before proceeding to negotiations on the final settlement, the most important of which are the third phase of Israeli withdrawal, safe passage between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip and the operation of the port of Gaza, among others. Egypt is closely following the developments relating to the implementation of the Wye River Memorandum. In this regard, I should like to take this opportunity to congratulate the Palestinian delegation on the opening of Gaza International Airport on 24 November.

It is unfortunate that the Israeli Government is undertaking a number of unilateral actions aimed at bolstering the illegal position of its settlers in the occupied Palestinian territories, including Jerusalem, thereby violating all the relevant United Nations resolutions as well as its international obligations as the occupying Power, in accordance with the provisions of the Fourth Geneva Convention, which prohibits the occupying Power from, *inter alia*, transferring its civilian inhabitants to the territories it occupies.

In this context, Egypt is following with great concern media reports regarding the persistent measures by numerous Israeli groups and personalities to cement the illegal de facto Israeli presence in the Palestinian territories under Israeli occupation. These efforts are being echoed by officials within the Israeli Government who are encouraging its settlers to expropriate more land by force. While Egypt expresses its deep regret at such provocative statements, which flout international law, it urges the international community to fulfil its responsibilities in this regard.

Here I should like to focus on an important fact: it is impossible to establish real peace in the Middle East as long as Israel continues its settlerist policy. Egypt's position on this issue is clear. In 1979, Egypt signed a Peace Treaty with Israel by which Israel restored to Egypt all its territory in full. This constitutes a foundational precedent for the establishment of peace between Israel and the Arab parties. It also represents the appropriate interpretation of Security Council resolution 242 (1967). Furthermore, it places on Egypt a heavy responsibility to reject any efforts on the part of the Israelis to impose settlerism on the Palestinian side as a fait accompli that must be acquiesced in. The foundations of the peace that Egypt established with Israel were, first, the application of the principle of land for peace, which called for withdrawal from all the occupied territories; secondly, the removal from all territories of any and all Israeli settlements; and, thirdly, the setting up of reciprocal security arrangements. Egypt believes that those bases should be applied with regard to peace between Israel and the other Arab parties.

We are also following with particular concern the consistent and intensive Israeli activities aimed at changing the geographic and demographic nature of the city of Jerusalem, either through emptying it of its Palestinian residents and forcing them to leave or through the intensification of the drive to construct and expand settlements within East Jerusalem and its surroundings so as to consolidate its illegal annexation by Israel. In so doing, Israel is clearly violating the principles of international relations which are set forth in all the relevant United Nations resolutions, especially Security Council resolutions 465 (1980) and 478 (1980), as well as the provisions of the Fourth Geneva Convention. Israel, by these actions, is also ignoring the arrangements that it agreed to in the Oslo agreement, whereby the future status of the city of Jerusalem would be one of the issues to be addressed in the final status negotiations.

Before concluding, I should like to express my extreme dismay at the statement made yesterday in the Assembly by the representative of Israel. Peace requires all of us, whether Arab or Israeli, to set aside the historical aspect of the conflict and to disregard the past, with all its negative aspects. Peace also requires us to look forward with hope to the future, with all the positive aspects that it can bring. It is evident that the statement made by the delegation of Israel contravenes the requirements of peace. The statement has led us to wonder again through the labyrinth of ancient history. It contained many falsehoods, which are known as such to everyone.

I do not intend to respond in detail to the representative of Israel, but there are certain basic historical facts that relate to Egypt and the area which I must briefly elucidate.

First, it was the leadership of Arab Palestine under the Mandate, which represented 65 per cent of the population of Palestine, that asked the Arab States for help in 1948. This was in exercise of the legitimate right of collective self-defence and to avoid the loss of more territories after that leadership, finding itself unable to withstand the campaigns of Zionist terrorist groups such as the Irgun and Stern gang, which, as is well-known, were responsible for the assassination of Count Folke Bernadotte, the representative of the Secretary-General in Palestine. That is the true history.

Secondly, contrary to what the representative of Israel has claimed, the West Bank and Gaza are not disputed territories. They are territories occupied by Israel, as is confirmed by the resolutions of the Security Council and the General Assembly, as well as by the provisions of international law. Israel must withdraw from those territories.

Thirdly, the Gaza Strip has never been under Egyptian occupation, as claimed by the representative of Israel. Egypt exercised transitional administration over the Strip, in accordance with the Armistice Agreement signed with Israel on 24 February 1949 and adopted later by the Security Council, until peace was achieved in the area. There is no comparison between the Egyptian transitional administration of the Gaza Strip, and Israel's occupation of it. This is the true history.

Fourthly, history will recall that it was Israel which was in collusion with European States in 1956 in attacking Egypt. History will also recall that Israel, in spite of what the representative of Israel may now say, initiated the attack on Egypt on 5 June 1967. That attack was premeditated, organized and well planned for years, as has been admitted by the Israelis themselves in books and testimonials which are there for all to see. This is the true history.

Fifthly, as for the falsehoods raised by the Israeli representative regarding Security Council resolution 242 (1967), suffice it to rebut them by what I have said in this statement. To this, I may add that the Security Council functions in accordance with the provisions of the Charter and the rules of international law. These stipulate that the territories that were occupied must be evacuated, and that the Security Council does not have the authority to dispose of territories of States. As was said in 1967, following the adoption by the Security Council of resolution 242 (1967),

(Spoke in English)

> the Council is not in the real estate business to dispense with the territories of other countries.

(Spoke in Arabic)

I did not wish to have the Israeli representative involve us in polemics which are not called for. However, he insisted on voicing publicly here, in this bastion of international legitimacy, views fit only for consumption in Israel. What he said here is not material for well-considered and honest presentation to the representatives of the international community gathered here in the General Assembly. What is required of all of us is to look to a better future in which a just and comprehensive peace will be achieved for all.

In conclusion, I wish to say that a just settlement of the Palestinian question is the key to achieving peace in the Middle East. Without reaching such a settlement, the region will remain on the brink of tension, violence and instability.

Egypt endeavours with all its resources to achieve such a just settlement. We hope that Israel will equally show seriousness in working to achieve peace in the region, not only through the conclusion of short-term and partial solutions, but by reaching a comprehensive settlement acceptable to the Palestinian side, which has for 50 years endured this suffering that must come to an end soon.

Mr. Waheed (Pakistan): As an annual feature of the General Assembly, we are again today considering the question of Palestine, which reflects our unswerving collective commitment to a lasting solution of this problem.

It is our firm belief that no durable peace in the Middle East is possible without achieving a peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine. The realization of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people and the withdrawal of Israel from the Palestinian territories are essential for any meaningful progress in the peace process.

Pakistan's support of the just struggle for the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people is well known. We have always called for the implementation of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978), which provide the framework for a durable and comprehensive peace in the Middle East.

The international community has been closely monitoring the recent developments concerning the negotiations between Israel and the Palestinian authorities. We are heartened by the progress made towards the resumption of the Middle East peace process and the conclusion of Wye River Memorandum on 23 October 1998. The agreement must be implemented in full with a view to restoring the atmosphere of confidence, which, we believe, would enable them to move towards the permanent status negotiations as envisaged in the Oslo agreements.

We note with appreciation the political determination and sagacious policies of the Palestinian leadership to pursue the cause of peace with justice, which should be reciprocated by all concerned. We would like once again to reiterate our whole-hearted support to the Palestinian leadership in all its efforts towards achieving a lasting peace.

The special significance of the Holy City of Al-Quds al-Sharif for the international community in general and the Islamic Ummah in particular, requires no elaboration. We believe that Al-Quds al-Sharif, occupied by Israel since 1967, remains central to any comprehensive settlement. No lasting peace is possible without the return of Al-Quds al-Sharif and all occupied territories to the Palestinian people.

We welcome the General Assembly's adoption under agenda item 157 of the resolution entitled "Bethlehem 2000", which is a clear manifestation of the commitment of the international community towards the people of Palestine and their prosperity. The Israeli authorities must respond to the appeal made in the resolution for ensuring free and unhindered access to the holy places in Bethlehem to the faithful of all religions and citizens of all nationalities. It is our earnest hope that the international community, particularly the donor countries and the United Nations agencies, will extend its support and cooperation to the Bethlehem 2000 project so that the project can be implemented as envisaged in the annex to General Assembly document A/53/141 of 15 May 1998.

The Palestinian National Authority is in need of substantial economic assistance to alleviate the sufferings of the Palestinian people and to re-build their devastated economy. It is imperative that the international community, particularly the United Nations, continue to encourage, assist and support the peace process and provide urgent assistance to the Palestinian National Authority.

In conclusion, I would like to reaffirm to our Palestinian brethren that Pakistan will continue to extend its principled and firm support for their just struggle to achieve their legitimate right to sovereign existence and for their desire to live in peace, with honour and dignity.

Mr. Hachani (Tunisia) (*interpretation from Arabic*): As it has done for more than half a century, the General Assembly at its fifty-third session is once again considering the question of Palestine. This endows the question with special importance, given the sensitive situation in the occupied territories and in the Middle East in general. With the passage of time, especially since the conclusion of the Oslo accords, the Declaration of Principles and the other subsequent arrangements, and given the high hopes and expectations generated by these agreements for the possible establishment of a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the region, it became more and more certain that the implementation on the ground of those objectives will be accelerated to make irreversible the dynamic of peace, and to achieve all the goals we are pursuing.

Like other peace-loving countries, Tunisia has long warned here of the threat of an explosion in the region posed by the deadlock in the peace process which will suffer a setback if Israel fails to fulfil the commitments it made in the agreements it has concluded with the Palestinian side. Moreover, Israel has halted negotiations on the Syrian and Lebanese tracks, thus reneging on the peace process and on the principles on which it is based, notably that of land for peace.

Tunisia therefore acknowledges the importance of the signing by the Palestinian and Israeli sides of the Wye River Memorandum of 23 October 1998, and appreciates the efforts the United States made to achieve that agreement.

The negative developments in the peace process over the past two years show how necessary it is for the parties to fulfil their commitments under the agreements they have concluded. It is no secret that the success of any agreement is measured by the extent to which the parties to the agreement respect its provisions and abide by its requirements. Although the Palestinian side has fulfilled all its contractual commitments, Israel continues to prevaricate and to shirk its responsibilities. Consequently, Israel is obliged to respect scrupulously and unconditionally the Wye River Memorandum which it signed, and which reaffirms the provisions of previous agreements. The Israeli Government should end its policy of procrastination and demonstrate the good faith required of it to guarantee success on all the negotiating tracks and to build confidence with the Palestinian side. In this context, Israel can do this by being faithful and honest with regard to all its commitments under those agreements. Israel must implement the staged withdrawal from the occupied Palestinian territories. It must also resume negotiations immediately with the Palestinians on a final solution with a view to completing them by the end of the transitional phase in May 1999. Israel must also renounce all unilateral action that could have an adverse impact on the results of the negotiations, including, in particular, the construction of settlements on Palestinian territory and in East Jerusalem. Israel must further put an end to its other illegal actions, which are aimed at changing the demographic composition, and eliminating the Arab and Islamic character of Al-Quds and at its Judaization. Those actions run counter to the provisions of General Assembly and Security Council resolutions and to the Fourth Geneva Convention, relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, of 12 August 1949.

Israel should renounce once and for all policies of collective punishment and economic blockades against the Palestinian people, along with other illegal practices, and it should release Palestinian prisoners in accordance with the agreements it has signed. Israel must also prove its good faith towards the other Arab parties by returning to the negotiations table with Syria and Lebanon so that those two brotherly States can regain their usurped territories — the occupied Golan and southern Lebanon — in accordance with Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978).

The President of Tunisia, Mr. Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, has stressed that the peace process must be protected from any interruption or regression, because the future of the entire region depends upon the achievement of a just, comprehensive and lasting peace. The international community should continue to be vigilant and firm in its efforts to establish the peace which we desire in the Middle East.

Here I would like to quote from the message from President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali on the occasion of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. The message reads in part,

> "Tunisia calls on the international community, particularly the co-sponsors of the peace process and the European Union, to step up their endeavours in support of the peace process and the furthering of the international legitimacy in which it is based in order to create an atmosphere conducive to a just, comprehensive and lasting solution which would guarantee the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, to restore to Syria and Lebanon their territories now under occupation and to enable the peoples of the region to live in security, peace and prosperity."

In addition, the United Nations, particularly the General Assembly, have a permanent responsibility towards the Palestinian people. This responsibility must continue to be shouldered because of the two States which were issued birth certificates by the United Nations in 1947, only the Jewish State was established, while the Palestinian State has yet to be established. The Palestinian people continues to aspire to the establishment of a State of its own, on its own territory. In that connection, we welcome the resolution adopted by the General Assembly last July enhancing the observer status of Palestine.

The United Nations is the guarantor and protector of principles of international legitimacy regarding the question of Palestine and the question of the Middle East in general. This is a political role which must continue. Parallel to this, the United Nations has another distinctive role which should be continued and bolstered: to mobilize international resources to provide economic assistance to the Palestinian people, and to ensure that the United Nations contributes to and coordinates such assistance. The economic and social development of the occupied Palestinian territories is an important factor in the efforts to establish peace. We urge the international community and donor countries to continue their assistance to the Palestinian people, to help the Palestinians improve their living conditions, and to support the efforts of the

Palestinian Authority to mobilize the resources and capacities necessary for economic and social development.

Tunisia has consistently supported the peace process and its progress throughout all its stages, out of our support for justice and in view of our solidarity with the brotherly Palestinian people with a view to the full recovery of their legitimate rights, in particular their right to the establishment of an independent State of their own on their own territory, with Al-Quds as its capital.

As the United Nations marks the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, Tunisia reaffirms that it will continue to be a firm and strong supporter of that people in its struggle to exercise its right of self-determination and its right to live a decent life.

In conclusion, I would like to pay tribute to the important role played by the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People under the chairmanship of Ambassador Ibra Ka in advancing and defending those rights. The report of the Committee to the General Assembly on its activities over the past year attests to that role.

Mr. Danesh-Yazdi (Islamic Republic of Iran): For more than half a century, the question of Palestine has been one of the prominent concerns of the international community. The Palestinian issue and the plight of Palestinian people remain the foremost cause of concern not only for the Islamic States but for many other nations of the world as well. Accordingly, the Islamic Republic of Iran is of the view that the Palestinian tragedy and the calamity faced by the Palestinian people due to Israeli occupation and oppression need to be accorded the highest priority and attention by the international community, in particular by the General Assembly, as the principal and the most authoritative universal body of the entire United Nations system.

We note with satisfaction the conspicuous contribution made by the General Assembly to address the Palestinian issue through the convening of its emergency special session and the adoption of crucial decisions, especially when the Security Council was rendered incapable of fulfilling its responsibilities due to the exercise of the veto power by a member of the Council. The exercise of the veto prompted the General Assembly to convene the tenth emergency special session to discuss the illegal Israeli actions in occupied East Jerusalem and the rest of occupied Palestinian territory.

That emergency special session produced important resolutions — in particular resolution ES-10/5 of 17 March 1998 — in which it reiterated, *inter alia*, condemnation of the Israeli regime for its failure to comply with the provisions of previous resolutions and stressed that all requirements prescribed in those resolutions should be fully and immediately implemented by Israel. The resolution further recommended the convening of a conference on measures to enforce the Fourth Geneva Convention in the occupied Palestinian territory in order to ensure the protection of the Palestinian people.

The international outrage against and condemnation of Israel have not, unfortunately, changed the pattern of its inhuman behaviour towards the Palestinian people and its illegal policies in the occupied territories. In this context, the report of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, contained in document A/53/35, presents a harrowing picture of the current situation in the occupied territories, which is marked by brutal practices and every imaginable tactic on the part of the Israeli regime aimed at depriving the Palestinian people of the exercise of their legitimate rights.

The report refers to a great number of confiscations of Palestinian lands and the demolition of their houses throughout the occupied Palestinian territory, including Jerusalem, in pursuance of the stated Israeli policy. As a consequence of the unlawful settlement policy, thousands of Palestinians have been forced to leave their ancestral lands or have been displaced. The report further details that settlers have on numerous occasions provoked violent confrontations with Palestinian civilians by moving illegally into Palestinian areas and forcibly occupying or beginning the construction of new housing, under Israeli police protection.

The continued imprisonment of thousands of Palestinian and Arab prisoners in Israeli jails has attracted the attention as well as the condemnation of the international community. The human rights treaty bodies have confirmed that these detainees have been subjected to psychological and physical torture by the Israeli authorities, resulting in a considerable deterioration of their health. The Israeli regime should be forced to heed the call of the international community to stop the ill treatment of prisoners, release these detainees, return the deportees and put an end to the infamous practice of collective punishment.

The agony is deepened when we recall that 4 million Palestinians still live in diaspora, in refugee camps under precarious conditions. The Israeli policy of intimidation and forcible occupation, as well as the use of brute force, has been implemented in such a manner as to perpetuate their refugee status. The continuation of this unjust situation would undoubtedly prolong their suffering. It is thus incumbent upon the international community to bring this bleak situation to an end.

The Palestinian economic situation is a showcase of hardship and misery. The illegal measures taken by Israeli authorities, including the application of unjust limitations on public services, closures and the imposition of restrictions on the movement of persons and goods have severely deteriorated the living conditions of the Palestinian people.

The question of Palestine would not be properly dealt with without addressing the issue of Al-Quds al-Sharif, which is of paramount importance for the entire Islamic world. The obstinate Israeli policy of altering the Islamic character of Jerusalem through the continuous and persistent process of Judaization of the city has prompted indignation and anguish among Muslims throughout the world. The continued use of a tunnel opened in the vicinity of the Al-Aqsa Mosque in 1996, the construction of Jewish settlements in East Jerusalem and the newly announced creation of an umbrella municipality that expands the borders of Jerusalem and extends the administrative powers of the illegal municipality over nearby areas are intended to change the legal, religious and demographic composition of the Holy City of Al-Quds al-Sharif, thus creating a fait accompli in this respect. Such acts and policies have been conducted in flagrant infringement of various resolutions of the Security Council and the General Assembly. The Organization of the Islamic Conference, which owes its very *raison d'etre* to the Muslims' response to an act of arson against the Al-Aqsa Mosque in 1969, has constantly condemned the Israeli acts and called for action to put an end to the practices of the Israeli occupying authorities in Jerusalem.

The current situation in the Middle East is still marked by wounds and injustice as a result of the Israeli policy of expansion. Israel's intention to dominate the whole region through aggression, occupation and terrorism hardly needs any explanation. The continued occupation of Palestine, southern Lebanon and the Syrian Golan Heights, in contravention of the relevant resolutions of the Security Council and the General Assembly, represent a consistent Israeli policy of domination and aggression. The ongoing volatile situation in southern Lebanon is further exacerbated by recent public statements by Israeli authorities marked by heavy-handedness and aimed at perpetuating oppression and occupation.

The same policy is pursued through the enhancement of Israeli military capabilities, particularly in terms of nuclear-weapon technology, which continues to go unchecked. It is self-evident that Israeli militarism and its arsenal of weapons of mass destruction, which have thwarted all disarmament initiatives and mechanisms in the region, pose a serious threat and danger to stability and security in the Middle East. The refusal of Israel to adhere to internationally agreed treaties and to accept the International Atomic Energy Agency safeguards regime continues to be the obstacle to the creation of a safe and secure environment in the region.

The Israeli policies and practices, only partially referred to here, have seriously destabilized the already volatile situation in the Middle East. As long as the policy of aggression, state terrorism, occupation, violation of basic human rights and expansionism continues to rule, today's bleak situation will continue to endure.

I wish to close by quoting from President Khatami's remarks made from this podium on 21 September this year:

> "Peace and security in the Middle East, imperative as they are, will only be established through the recognition of the right of all Palestinians to exercise sovereignty over their ancestral homeland. The presently occupied Al-Quds al-Sharif ought to be the house of dialogue and understanding. Resonating from the depth of history, its voice speaks intrinsically against racism and Zionism. Great monotheistic religions can live peacefully together in Al-Quds al-Sharif, but it is the very Israeli rule that has made such a coexistence impossible." *(A/53/PV.8, p. 6)*

Mr. Theron (Namibia): Permit me to begin by saying how glad my delegation is to be able to participate in this debate at a time when the whole world is holding its breath because of the positive signs indicating progress towards the achievement of a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the question of Palestine, based on relevant Security Council and General Assembly resolutions.

One of the important lessons that my country learned during its long struggle for independence was never to give up hope but rather to continue to be courageous in trying to achieve freedom. For Namibia this paid dividends, and that is why we are today encouraged by the latest developments regarding Palestine's quest for self-determination, national independence and sovereignty.

The signing of the Wye River Memorandum on 23 October 1998 not only signalled the adoption of measures that will move the peace process forward, but it certainly also provided the players with new tools and a golden opportunity to ensure that true, lasting peace is obtained in the region. We thus welcome the efforts by both parties to implement the Memorandum, especially with regard to the redeployment of troops and security arrangements. The undertaking by the parties to resume final status negotiations is welcome, and we call upon them — in particular Israel — not to undertake measures that might compromise the outcome of these negotiations. At the same time, we urge the sponsors of the peace process, the Security Council and the international community as a whole, now more than ever to redouble their efforts to push the process through.

My delegation, as a member of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, wholly subscribes to the report of the Chairman of the Committee. We wish in particular to stress the importance of peace and reconciliation in the Middle East, which is essential for international peace and security. Furthermore, we share the concerns regarding the adverse human rights situation and the deteriorating humanitarian conditions in the occupied territories.

Namibia remains committed to providing unwavering support for a speedy resolution to the Palestinian question. That is why we have undertaken to host the African regional meeting at Windhoek in April 1999. The meeting will be called the "African meeting in support of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People" and will contribute towards informing international public opinion and promoting action in support of a comprehensive, just and lasting resolution of the question of Palestine in accordance with relevant United Nations resolutions.

My delegation will fail in its duty if, in this forum, it does not congratulate and express its solidarity with the Palestine Liberation Organization and all the Palestinian people on the occasion of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, which was commemorated yesterday.

Finally, my Government will continue to give its full support to the Secretary-General in his endeavours to ensure that the United Nations system contributes its utmost in the fields of the economic and social development of the Palestinian people, which is essential for building peace throughout the Middle East.

Mr. Al-Nassir (Qatar) (*interpretation from Arabic*): As we are debating the agenda item on the question of Palestine, I wish at the outset to convey to Mr. Opertti my delegation's appreciation for the efforts he has made regarding the Palestinian question since his assumption of the presidency of the General Assembly at this session. The consensus achieved on the draft resolution entitled "Bethlehem 2000" was one of the first fruits of these efforts.

I wish also to thank the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, for his good offices and persistent efforts to resolve outstanding international issues because of his commitment to international peace and security.

I would also like to take this opportunity to express our appreciation to the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People and to its Chairman, Mr. Ibra Deguène Ka, for the noble efforts made in the service of the just cause of the Palestinian people and to enable that people to attain all their legitimate rights and to establish their independent State on their national territory.

The Charter of the United Nations sets forth the right of peoples to exercise their right to self-determination, a right that has so far eluded the Palestinian people. It is incredibly ironic that all the peoples of the world are commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights at a time when the Palestinian people are suffering the tragic plight of 50 years' occupation their territories, obliteration of their identity and displacement for most of them. Israel has also recently celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of its establishment at a time when the Palestinian people are languishing under this hideous occupation.

The United Nations has a historical and ethical responsibility towards the Palestinian people. While General Assembly resolution 181 (II) of 29 November 1947 gave Israel the right to exist, the Palestinian people are still struggling for the establishment of their independent state. That resolution provided for the establishment of two States, one Arab and one Jewish, but only one of these two States has been established.

The Madrid Peace Conference of 1991, held under the auspices of the United States and the Russian Federation, was based on the principle of land for peace in order to achieve a just and lasting peace in the Middle East. On this basis, the Arab States opted for peace — a strategic option for them. Despite all the obstacles facing the peace process at that time, the Declaration of Principles was concluded between the two sides — Palestinian and Israeli — and the Treaty of Peace between Jordan and Israel was also signed. On the Syrian and Lebanese tracks, negotiations also achieved a measure of progress, in spite of the difficulties surrounding the negotiations.

But after the assassination of Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and the ensuing elections, another Administration came into being in Israel, which led to a cessation of the peace process on all tracks. The entire peace process suffered a setback because of the Israeli Government's reneging on its prior commitments. And despite the American efforts — that is, the efforts of the American President — the situation with regard to the Palestinian track remained unchanged for about 18 months.

Following that period, the Palestinians and the Israelis were brought together in a direct meeting under the auspices of the American President whose efforts were joined by the valuable efforts of King Hussein of Jordan. That meeting was crowned by the signing of the Wye River Memorandum. Despite the fact that the Memorandum dealt with matters on which certain negotiations with the previous Israeli Government had already taken place, the Palestinian side demonstrated great flexibility in order to reach a solution. After the implementation of the first phase of this agreement, and despite all the obstacles that are well known to everyone, we hope that the rest will be implemented as soon as possible. At the same time, negotiations will start on the permanent status on the basis of relevant resolutions of international legitimacy, especially Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973).

One of the important issues that have to be resolved is the issue of Palestinian refugees; the Israeli Government should have had to allow them to return, in accordance with the Declaration of Principles providing for the return of the Palestinians who have been refugees since 1967, who number about 750,000. However, the intransigence of the Israeli Government has impeded that return, despite the fact that the return of refugees is an international right embodied in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In addition, the establishment of settlements in the occupied Arab territories, the expropriation of more Palestinian land, the demolition of Palestinian houses, the construction of bypass roads as a means of urban strangulation, the closing of roads and of other occupied areas, and economic blockade are all measures which flagrantly contravened the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War of 12 August 1949, as well as of the relevant Security Council resolutions. They also contravene the letter and the spirit of the peace process, lead to violence in the area and further impede the peace process.

As to the Syrian and Lebanese tracks, the Israeli Government has turned its back on all the progress achieved, thus nullifying great efforts that were made. It calls for returning to square one, a call which is not logical and is contrary to reason. Further, it is not a call that reflects good faith in the restoration of peace to the area. We all call on the Israeli Government to remain committed to the resumption of negotiations from the point they had reached. We also call on the sponsors of the peace process to take up their role fully in order to achieve the desired goal: a just and lasting peace in the Middle East in accordance with the resolutions of international legitimacy and all the resolutions of the General Assembly, including resolutions 181 (II) and 194 (III), as well as Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978).

In conclusion, we would like to express the hope that all the efforts will be united, thus enabling the Palestinian people to exercise its inalienable rights and to establish its independent State on its national territory, with Jerusalem as its capital, in accordance with the resolutions of international legitimacy, at the end of the transitional phase. We also hope not to usher in the next century without the Middle East being an oasis of peace and security after the restoration of all the usurped Arab rights, the establishment of the independent Palestinian State and the return of the occupied Syrian Golan, as well as southern Lebanon and West Bekaa.

The Acting President: We have heard the last speaker in the debate on this item.

I shall now call on those representatives who wish to speak in exercise of the right of reply.

May I remind members that statements in exercise of the right of reply are limited to 10 minutes for the first intervention and to five minutes for the second and should be made by delegations from their seats.

Mr. Al-Kidwa (Palestine) (*interpretation from Arabic*): Yesterday, under this item, "Question of Palestine", we heard a statement that was not appropriate for the United Nations and the General Assembly. That statement tried to falsify history. It included many contradictions and torpedoed the basis for mutual recognition between the Palestinian and the Israeli sides, as well as the basis for the peace process in the Middle East.

The Ambassador of Israel yesterday denied that there is a Palestinian land and that there is a Palestinian people. He denied occupation. He tried to legitimize the forcible occupation by Israeli settlers on our land. This is not only an extremist kind of position, not only a position that is not in harmony with the peace process in the Middle East, but it is also a very serious position that reflects ideological legends and mythology that run counter to the spirit of the era, as well as the purposes and principles of the Charter. It undermines peace and security in all the Middle East. Thus, this position must be rejected and condemned, not only by the Palestinian side but also by the international community as a whole.

In view of this, I will not respond to the details included in the speaker's statement, except for one point, because it is related to an important event that will take place in the near future: the confirmation of the declaration of independence of Palestine and the establishment of the State of Palestine next year. This point is also related to the Israeli allegation that this step represents a unilateral action and contradicts and violates the agreements concluded. The Palestinian leadership has repeatedly declared its determination to take this historic step on 4 May 1999 and has appealed to the international community to lend its support to this step.

I must make it clear that this position represents neither a threat nor a challenge to any one. It reflects the objective fact that the five-year interim period agreed upon by the Palestinian and Israeli sides, in accordance with the 1993 Declaration of Principles, expires on that date. We hope that both sides will reach an agreement on the final status before then. Unfortunately, the Israeli position makes that rather difficult.

Consequently, and if a final settlement is not reached before the end of the transitional period, the Palestinian side will have no choice but to assume its responsibility in accordance with the inalienable national rights of the Palestinian people and without prejudice to mutual recognition and the other obligations incumbent upon the two parties. We will have no option but to take the step that we have widely announced. Needless to say, at that point we shall strive tirelessly here at the United Nations to translate current developments on the ground into a *de jure* reality in the United Nations, hoping, at that time, that we will enjoy the Assembly's support for our future steps.

Mr. Jacob (Israel): In my comments, I do not wish to enter into an exchange with the Palestinian Permanent Observer. I believe that Israel's position, its desire to move forward in the peace process and its determination to achieve peace with our Palestinian neighbours, was stated clearly by the Permanent Representative of Israel yesterday.

Also clearly stated yesterday was the position of the head of the Palestinian observer delegation, steadfastly denying Israel's legitimacy and diminishing the clear progress made in the peace process to date. Unfortunately, this position has just been confirmed by the Palestinian Permanent Observer. No further commentary is necessary on my part.

Mr. Al-Kidwa (Palestine) (*interpretation from Arabic*): Suffice it for me to refer here to the fact that the representative of Israel was just now unable to use the proper designation for my position, which is the Permanent Observer of Palestine, not the Palestinian Observer. The representative of Israel cannot even use the correct United Nations terminology for my position. Hence, it is up to the Assembly to imagine the reality of this Israeli position.

More important, however, is the fact that our side, as reflected in our statement yesterday, is committed today and in the future to mutual recognition and to all its legal implications in accordance with the existing agreements. We do not deny the legitimacy of Israel and we certainly cannot accept that Israel should deny ours. It is absolutely unacceptable that the Ambassador of Israel should claim that the territories occupied in 1967 are disputed territories. This constitutes a call to us to return once more to demanding our full historical rights. Either there are existing agreements or there are compromises, or there is nothing. The Israeli side cannot have it both ways.

In any case, we leave the evaluation of the differing positions to the States Members of the United Nations, which has a clear position on Israel's policies and positions, especially those recently declared in this very Hall and elsewhere at the United Nations.

The meeting rose at 1.10 p.m.

United Nations

A/53/PV.75

General Assembly

Fifty-third Session

75th plenary meeting

Tuesday, 1 December 1998, 3.00 p.m.
New York

Official Records

President: Mr. Opertti .... (Uruguay)

In the absence of the President, Mr. Mangoaela (Lesotho), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

Agenda item 40

The situation in the Middle East

Reports of the Secretary-General (A/53/550, A/53/652)

Draft resolutions (A/53/L.52, A/53/L.53 and Corr.1)

Mr. Sucharipa (Austria): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union. The Central and Eastern European countries associated with the European Union — Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia — and the associated country Cyprus, as well as the European Free Trade Association countries members of the European Economic Area, Iceland and Liechtenstein, align themselves with this statement.

On a personal note, let me express my hope that the interest that the United Nations takes in Middle East issues is not reflected by the number of representatives present in this Hall at the beginning of the debate.

At the beginning of this decade, the Madrid Conference and the Oslo process opened the way for mutual recognition between Israel and its neighbours, and for a negotiated peace in the entire region. The people of the Middle East found themselves in a situation where life in security, mutual respect, dignity and peace seemed finally at hand. However, this tremendous hope has often been challenged over the years. The absence of progress in the negotiations, reluctance to implement agreements, terrorism and the upsurge of violence have undermined mutual trust, as well as the parties' confidence in the peace process.

Today, the European Union feels encouraged in its hope for early peace in the Middle East by the important forward movement on the Palestinian track brought about at Wye River Plantation on 23 October 1998. In the meantime, initial steps have been taken with a view to implementing the obligations under the Wye River Memorandum. We encourage the parties to proceed further on this promising path, to complete their negotiations on the remaining issues under the Interim Agreement and to engage fully in final status negotiations. In this context, the European Union also calls upon the international community to lend its full support to the parties at this important juncture in the peace process.

The European Union hopes and expects that this recent breakthrough on the Palestinian track will have positive effects on the Middle East as a whole. We are of the opinion that it is of the highest importance to reinvigorate the Syrian and Lebanese tracks with a view to achieving a comprehensive peace based on the

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principle of land for peace and the relevant Security Council resolutions. In this context, we reiterate our call for speedy implementation of Security Council resolution 425 (1978).

The European Union strongly supports the right of Israel to live within safe and recognized borders. We condemn in the strongest terms acts of terrorism and stress our determination to fight terrorism wherever it occurs. We therefore urge all the parties in the peace process to do their utmost to forestall extremist actions and to deny success to extremists and others seeking to frustrate the process through provocation.

We also reaffirm our basic position concerning the status of Jerusalem. East Jerusalem is subject to the principles set out in Security Council resolution 242 (1967), which affirms, in particular, the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by force.

It is essential that the parties fully honour their obligations in the framework of the Madrid and Oslo process with a view to rebuilding and strengthening mutual trust. With this in mind, the European Union calls upon the parties to avoid all unilateral acts which could prejudge the outcome of bilateral negotiations. In this context, the European Union reiterates that the provisions of the Fourth Geneva Convention are to be strictly implemented with regard to all occupied territories, including East Jerusalem and the Golan Heights.

The President of the Council of Ministers of the European Union, Vice-Chancellor Mr. Wolfgang Schüssel, accompanied by representatives of the European Commission and by the European Union's Special Envoy, Ambassador Moratinos, visited the Middle East in mid-November. In numerous discussions with political leaders in the region, they underlined the deep commitment of the European Union to the peace process and its determination to play a substantial part in the political and economic fields.

In this regard, the European Union will continue its efforts, in particular through Special Envoy Moratinos, to help restart negotiations on the Syrian and Lebanese tracks. We also reaffirm our readiness to be fully associated with the implementation of the Wye River Memorandum and to contribute to the final status issues to be negotiated between Israel and the Palestinians. Likewise, the European Union remains determined to help relaunch the multilateral negotiations which deal with strategic issues affecting the Middle East and which began with the Madrid Conference in 1991.

Recognizing the importance of a sound economy to social and political stability, the European Union will continue its considerable economic and technical assistance. In this context, we will be extensively involved in the follow-up to the Ministerial Conference to support Middle East Peace and Development, which took place yesterday in Washington, D.C.

In concluding, the European Union would like to reiterate its firm commitment to the peace process based on the principles enshrined in the Madrid and Oslo accords, as well as in Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978). The European Union has a lot to offer in this context and is determined to play its full part in order to contribute to a peaceful and prosperous future in the Middle East.

Mr. Gold (Israel): The situation in Lebanon has become a microcosm of the situation in the entire Middle East. The continuing failure of the Government of Lebanon to assert its authority over its own territory has produced a dangerous vacuum that has been exploited by the forces determined to undermine the stability of the entire region. It would be a gross miscalculation to assume that Israel is the only country affected by the vast infrastructure of international terrorism that has spread through the Bekaa Valley, in eastern Lebanon; Hezbollah strikes at Israeli soldiers and at villages in northern Israel, but its offshoots reach as far as Bahrain, Dahran in Saudi Arabia and into Kuwait; the Abu Nidal organization has struck at Turkey, Pakistan, Greece and Jordan. Militant fundamentalists from Egypt and Saudi Arabia have trained in recent years in the Bekaa Valley as well.

There is a simple way to quickly improve the security of the entire Middle East. It does not require elaborate security architectures borrowed from the experience of Europe. It does not have to await the emergence of pluralistic democratic institutions across the region based on accountable government and free elections. It does not even require formal peace treaties between all the States of the region. The shortest path to regional stability in the Middle East is dismantling the elaborate infrastructure of international terrorism in Lebanon. Israel's acceptance of Security Council resolution 425 (1978) this year can serve as a foundation for this more secure future.

What, after all, has Israel intended in accepting this resolution? It has expressed its willingness to withdraw its remaining forces from the southern Lebanon security zone as long as two other interrelated concerns are addressed in accordance with the language of the resolution. First, Lebanon's authority must be restored in the south; Israel believes that the Lebanese army of 1998 is fully capable of taking on this responsibility. Secondly, Israel seeks security arrangements that will assure that the international border to which the Israel Defence Forces will withdraw will be secure. Israel seeks only the assurance that any area from which it withdraws does not become a springboard for terrorist attacks in the future.

And yet Israel's acceptance of Security Council resolution 425 (1978) has elicited only a negative response. In fact, Israel finds itself in the ironic position of facing Arab opposition to an Israeli withdrawal from Arab territory. Israel has not asked for a peace treaty with Lebanon in exchange for this withdrawal. Israel has not insisted on the normalization of relations with Lebanon. Israel has sought only one objective: security. But powerful external forces have an interest in the ongoing conflict on the soil of Lebanon. It is no surprise that those who in fact object to an Israeli pull-out have the least interest in the common welfare of the Middle East in general, and of Lebanon in particular.

For Iran, in particular, Hezbollah's war against Israel serves its national interest of penetrating the Arab world, through the radicalization of the Shiite Arab communities in the region. Moreover, by having a spearhead for direct conflict with Israel, through Hezbollah and Palestinian Islamic Jihad, Iran can elicit the sympathy of Arab States and deflect attention away from its own ambitions of hegemony in the Gulf region.

Iran's support for Hezbollah has been direct. Iranian cargo aircraft regularly land at Damascus International Airport, where they unload large amounts of weaponry, including Sagger anti-tank missiles, long-range Katyusha rockets and high-explosive anti-tank mines. These munitions are then transhipped to the Bekaa Valley and transferred to Hezbollah forces for operations in southern Lebanon or use in international terror operations. The frequency of these Iranian deliveries to Hezbollah, through Syria, have not decreased in any way since the election of President Mohammad Khatami in Iran, on 3 August 1997. Even if the dollar amount of Iranian aid to Hezbollah has declined in the last five years, Hezbollah has managed to more than adequately compensate for this reduction by means of increasing involvement in the Lebanese narcotics trade.

Iran would not be able to back Hezbollah militarily without the complete support of Syria, which has its own separate agenda in the conflict in Lebanon. There is no basis for speculation that an Israeli withdrawal would jeopardize Syria's position in Lebanon. In fact, Israel has not tied its offer to withdraw from Southern Lebanon to the fate of 35,000 Syrian soldiers today deployed throughout the country, even though previous proposals actually linked the fate of all foreign forces in the country. The true reason why Syria supports the status quo in Lebanon is simple: for Syria, Hezbollah's war against Israel is intended to provide negotiating leverage for a full Israeli withdrawal from the Golan Heights to the lines of 4 June 1967.

Israel cannot accept any linkage between the question of southern Lebanon and any future negotiations with Syria. Whether Israel is engaged in negotiations on the Palestinian track or in negotiations with Syria, Israel will not accept the notion that terrorism — whether direct or by proxy — is a legitimate instrument for advancing positions at the peace table. It is simply untenable to accept a situation whereby every time Israeli and Syrian negotiators hit a possible impasse, Katyusha rockets fly from Lebanon into the Galilee. For peace to succeed, the threat of violence cannot hover over the negotiating table.

Israel is ready to resume negotiations with Syria without preconditions. The foundation of these negotiations lies in the 1991 Madrid Conference invitation, which includes reference to Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973). Resolution 242 (1967) contains fundamental principles, such as secure and recognized boundaries. Israel and Syria must negotiate on where secure and recognized borders are to be situated. The 4 June line between Israel and Syria was neither secure nor recognized. In entering the Golan Heights in June 1967, Israel took control of an area from which it had been repeatedly attacked. This is the basis of Israel's claim to defensible borders.

Moreover, the preambular part of Security Council resolution 242 (1967) emphasizes the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by war. Yet the line of 4 June contains territories that were originally part of British Mandatory Palestine — such as the demilitarized zones in Al-Hamma or Banias, and other areas — and these were seized by the Syrian armed forces in the late 1940s and early 1950s.

How can the General Assembly call on Israel to withdraw to a line that grants Syria territories which it acquired by the use of force, contrary to Security Council resolution 242 (1967)? Are we again facing a situation where the resolutions of the General Assembly contradict what has been recommended by the Security Council?

The situation in the Middle East is troubling. The decline in oil revenues across the region and rapidly rising population growth contains a dangerous potential for instability. Hegemonical Powers that seek to project their influence across the Middle East are ready to exploit this potential to advance their interests.

Despite these challenges, Israel is ready to advance the process of peace and reconciliation with its neighbours. The underlying theme in Israel's approach to peace is its insistence on security in all arrangements, whether with Lebanon or in reaching peace with Syria. Security means that terrorism must be dismantled. Security also means that peace arrangements must be structured that can last for generations. For a peace that cannot be defended will not last.

Mr. Effendi (Indonesia): The General Assembly's consideration of the situation in the Middle East at its fifty-third session is taking place at an opportune time. For too long, the region has been beset by conflict and instability. The advent of the next millennium requires the Organization to exert intensified efforts so that the Middle East region can finally move forward on the path to lasting peace and sustainable development.

It has been Indonesia's hope that the peace process launched in Madrid in 1991 will open unprecedented opportunities to bring the Arab-Israeli conflict to a peaceful resolution. The Palestinian, Syrian and Lebanese leadership have demonstrated not only through words but also through deeds their resolute commitment to achieving a comprehensive peace. On the Palestinian track, after the peace process was deadlocked for almost two years, we welcomed the recent Wye River Memorandum, which finally put the peace process back on track by restoring much-needed momentum. In this regard, its scrupulous implementation is necessary to translate into reality the will and determination of the parties.

While this positive development bodes well for the overall prospects for peace on the Palestinian front, the most formidable obstacle lying in the way is that of settlements, particularly in and around Jerusalem. Actions intended to change the demographic composition of the Holy City and policies of the closure, demolition and confiscation of Arab lands run counter to the spirit and letter of the agreements signed by the parties, and are in violation of all resolutions of international legitimacy. Their immediate termination is essential to promoting trust and confidence.

Nor can there be any justification for the stalemate on the Syrian-Israeli and Lebanese-Israeli tracks. Progress on these fronts requires good-faith efforts. If the past history of the region is any indicator, it is the great yearning of the people in the occupied territories to end the violence and turbulence that have engulfed their homelands for decades. Their voices resoundingly call out for peace, justice and security so that they can lead normal lives, pursue development to the fullest extent possible and bring prosperity to themselves and to future generations. The opportunities for achieving a comprehensive peace must be seized. In this regard, it is needless to emphasize that a just and lasting settlement of the Middle East conflict can only be achieved through the unconditional withdrawal of Israel from all occupied Arab territories in accordance with relevant resolutions of the United Nations, in particular Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978).

Finally, the United Nations should continue to play its role and exert its efforts to nurture the peace process. It has a vital stake in enhancing the stability of the Middle East region and a solemn obligation to ensure that a new order of peace, justice and prosperity takes root in those ancient lands.

Mr. Al-Kidwa (Palestine) (*interpretation from Arabic*): The situation in the Middle East continues to pose a threat to international peace and security. The Arab-Israeli conflict, of which the question of Palestine is the core, remains without a final solution, although some aspects of the conflict have been resolved. Here we emphasize that the failure thus far to achieve a just and comprehensive peace in the region is mainly the result of Israeli practices and policies, specifically policies of expansion aimed at acquiring ever more territory by illegitimate means at the expense of the most fundamental rights of the Palestinian people and in violation of the sovereignty of Syria and Lebanon, whose territory is under Israeli occupation.

There is not a single principle of international law and justice that Israel has not violated: the right of peoples to self-determination; the inadmissibility of the acquisition of the territory of others by means of war; the inadmissibility of the use or threat of use of force; the protection of civilian persons in time of war; the obligation to defend and maintain human rights; the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons; *et cetera*. There is not a single Security Council or General Assembly resolution on the Middle East or on the question of Palestine that Israel has respected or implemented.

But the international community has not yet taken the necessary measures authorized by the Charter and by the principles of international law, not to mention the legal commitments undertaken by States parties to the four Geneva Conventions. We continue to hope that such measures will be taken, not only because of Palestinian and Arab interest, but also because they would help create a just and better balanced world order free of double standards and bias.

Since the peace process began in Madrid, and following the 1993 Declaration of Principles agreed by the Government of Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization, we all had renewed hope for the speedy achievement of peace in the Middle East and for building a new Middle East with a better future for the peoples of the region. Intermittently, indeed, the peace process made reasonable progress. But regrettably it did not progress in a natural way. On many occasions it seemed frozen, and at other times it appeared to be on the brink on collapse. We would like to affirm here that the only way that will lead to the continuation and success of that process is that of strict adherence to the concluded agreements and to the basis of the peace process, which is anchored in Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) and in the principle of land for peace. Occupied land must be returned to its rightful owners so that normal relations can be established between States in the region. A Palestinian State with the Holy City of Jerusalem as its capital must be established in order for comprehensive peace to reign in the Middle East. Continuous progress must be made on the various tracks of the peace process, namely, the Palestinian, Syrian and Lebanese tracks.

In the same vein, serious progress must be made in ridding the Middle East of weapons of mass destruction, including nuclear weapons. In this connection, the Israeli nuclear facilities must be placed under International Atomic Energy Agency safeguards. Furthermore, Israel should accede to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, bearing in mind that Israel remains the only State in the Middle East outside the confines of that Treaty.

In the Middle East, as in other regions, terrorism must be confronted in all its forms, including state and internal terrorism in many countries of the region. On our side, we shall do our share in this regard, in accordance with the commitments we have undertaken. At the same time, we affirm the need for all parties to fulfil their obligations, in addition to dealing with the economic, social and political causes of this phenomenon that must be urgently uprooted.

On the occasion of yesterday's donors conference in Washington, we cannot fail to thank the donor countries, particularly those States that have renewed their financial commitments to the Palestinian people and the Palestinian National Authority, including the member States of the European Union, the United States of America, Japan, Norway and our sisterly Arab countries of the Persian Gulf.

Finally, before I conclude, I must again stress the importance of holding a conference of the States parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention to look into the implementation of the binding provisions of the Convention in the occupied Palestinian territories, including Jerusalem, as was confirmed by the resolutions of the tenth emergency special session of the General Assembly and as this session will once again reaffirm in the coming days.

Mr. Abdullah Ahmad (Malaysia): The item entitled "The situation in the Middle East" has been at the forefront of our agenda ever since it was first considered by the General Assembly at its twenty-fifth session, in 1970. Despite numerous efforts by the Organization, as well as other initiatives, the Arab-Israeli conflict seems to be as intractable as ever. The situation in the region continues to be characterized by a climate of tension and unstable security. This fact is indeed regrettable. Until and unless a comprehensive settlement covering all aspects of the Middle East problem can be reached, the situation will continue to be volatile, affecting not only the peace and stability of the region itself, but also international peace and security.

The cumulative effects of the prolonged Israeli occupation of the Arab territories in Palestine, Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic have highlighted the intransigence of Israel and its contempt for international law and the relevant resolutions of the United Nations. As is evident from the debate on the question of Palestine in the Assembly yesterday and this morning, there is an international consensus that a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East will not be achieved without the full exercise by the Palestinian people of their inalienable rights and the complete withdrawal of Israel from the occupied Palestinian and other Arab territories.

The international community is gratified at the recent signing of the Wye River Memorandum between the Palestinian leader, President Yasser Arafat, and the Israeli Prime Minister, Mr. Benjamin Netanyahu. After 18 months of stalemate, the Wye River Memorandum was indeed a welcome breakthrough in the Palestinian-Israeli peace process. The signing of this interim peace agreement, to be followed by the swift and scrupulous implementation of all its provisions, should go a long way in creating an atmosphere conducive to mutual trust and confidence between the two parties as they prepare for the next crucial step, which is the permanent status negotiations.

Even as we focus on the developments in the central issue of Palestine, there is also a need for us to attach similar importance to other aspects of the Middle East problem, namely, the questions relating to the Israeli occupation of southern Lebanon and the western Bekaa, as well as of the Syrian Golan Heights. The continued occupation of southern Lebanon and the western Bekaa by Israel is a blatant violation of Lebanon's independence and sovereignty. As events of recent weeks have shown, the continued presence of Israeli forces in southern Lebanon continues to be the source of violence and repression. Over the years this has resulted in an alarming number of civilian dead and wounded, severe damage to properties and thousands being displaced from their homes. The Israeli occupation of this area has posed a serious challenge to the Lebanese Government as it grapples with the monumental tasks of rebuilding its economy and strengthening its political stability.

Malaysia reaffirms its continued commitment and consistent support for Lebanon's quest for peace and security and an end to the Israeli occupation of southern Lebanon and the western Bekaa, in accordance with Security Council resolutions 425 (1978) and 426 (1978). We remain seriously concerned over the various acts of violence and hostility perpetrated by the Israeli armed forces in southern Lebanon, including the illegal detention of Lebanese nationals. While recognizing that the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon has to a certain extent contributed to stability in the area, we believe that peace can only endure if the return of the effective authority of the Lebanese Government in the area is ensured. In this regard, we take note of the decision taken last April by the Israeli Government to accept Security Council resolution 425 (1978). However, it should be emphasized that in accordance with that resolution, Israel's withdrawal from the Lebanese territory should be immediate and without any condition.

My delegation is similarly concerned over the lack of progress in the peace process between Israel and the Syrian Arab Republic. We had wholeheartedly welcomed the agreement reached in June 1995 between the late Prime Minister Rabin of Israel and President Al-Assad of Syria. The agreement was generally seen as a crucial breakthrough for more effective efforts to move the Syrian-Israeli track to a new and more intensive phase. We believe that maintaining the dialogue between the parties concerned, with the support of the international community, is an important contribution to peace, not only for the two countries but also for the whole Middle East region.

The existence of Israeli settlements in the occupied Syrian Golan has been a major stumbling block to the Syrian-Israeli peace process. The continued expansion of the settlements in the area represents a significant setback to the efforts to resume peace negotiations and further complicates the implementation of the principle of land for peace. Clearly, the policy of settlement expansion is intended to change the demographic character of the area, which is in violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949 and relevant Security Council and General Assembly resolutions. Such a policy raises serious questions about Israel's commitment to the peace process. My delegation strongly urges the Israeli Government to abandon this provocative and aggressive policy and desist from building new settlements in the occupied Golan Heights and to fully abide by the provisions of Security Council resolutions 338 (1973) and 497 (1981).

Malaysia has consistently called for a just and comprehensive solution to the Middle East conflict that would bring peace, security and stability to the region on the basis Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978).

My delegation would like to take this opportunity to express its utmost appreciation to the men and women serving with the UNIFIL peacekeeping mission in Lebanon and with the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force in the Syrian Arab Republic as well as to the troop-contributing countries. No doubt they have carried out their tasks in a difficult and often dangerous environment. Some of them have made the ultimate sacrifice for the cause of international peace and security. Our special tribute goes to them.

Mr. Allagany (Saudi Arabia) (*interpretation from Arabic*): The General Assembly is now considering the Middle East question. This region is at the forefront of regions on which the attention of the international community is focused and to which considerable international efforts are devoted in order to resolve existing conflicts and ensure regional stability and security for the peoples and States of the region.

Out of persistent concern for the establishment of a just and durable peace in the Middle East, and for the enhancement of security and stability in that region, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, since the beginning, has supported the peace process. It participated as an observer at the Madrid Peace Conference and has also actively participated in the multilateral discussions. Saudi Arabia will continue to support the peace process and to bolster it through its international activities and contacts. In this, we have been guided by the principles of the Madrid Conference, particularly the principle of land for peace, as well as by the relevant Security Council resolutions and the Oslo agreements.

Moreover, the Arab States, taking into account the Arab Summit Conference held in Cairo in June 1996, unanimously adopted a firm position whereby the peace option is regarded as an Arab strategic option. This confirms that there will be no Arab backsliding from that definite position. Thus, it is highly regrettable and of great concern, that after the peace process had made its debut in the region, and following the prevalence of an atmosphere of optimism regarding the feasibility of attaining peace, the peace process, which emanated from Madrid on the basis of international legitimacy and the resolutions of the United Nations, as well as from the principle of land for peace, quickly met with successive reverses as a result of acts of the present Israeli Government. That Government has adopted policies that cast off the principles of the peace process adopted at the Madrid Conference, which constitutes reneging on the agreements signed with the Palestinian National Authority. It has also rejected the idea of resuming negotiations with Syria from the point reached in prior negotiations. The Israeli Government has also continued to establish settlements on Palestinians lands in order to change the situation on the ground and establish a new fait accompli. This Government is also continuing its policy of Judaizing Al-Quds al-Sharif by setting up Israeli colonies there and in the surrounding areas with dense Jewish demographics, while emptying them of their Arab inhabitants. It has issued decrees whereby the Jerusalem area was expanded to include neighbouring settlements, thus pre-empting the negotiations on the final status of Jerusalem. It has taken important unilateral decisions that constitute one of the main obstacles to bringing about a just and comprehensive peace in the region.

These Israeli practices have doomed to failure the international community's endeavours to achieve a just and comprehensive peace based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) and on the principle of land for peace. Thus, the peace process has reached an impasse. Present actions by the Israeli Government do not leave us optimistic about the feasibility of establishing the long-awaited peace for the people of the region, unless these actions are confronted by strict and firm positions taken against Israel to compel it to fully implement the agreements signed with the Palestinians and to respect the fundamentals on which the peace process is based.

While we are pleased with the Israeli-Palestinian agreement recently achieved at Wye Plantation and pay tribute to President Bill Clinton in this regard, and while we hope that this agreement will constitute a step towards putting the peace process back on track, we appeal to the international community, and in particular to the United States, to continue to make every possible effort to end this Israeli absurdity in regard to the most delicate phase of the peace process, namely Jerusalem, Al-Quds al-Sharif. The question of Jerusalem must be treated as the most important issue in the Israeli-Arab conflict. In this regard, we call on Israel to cease taking unilateral measures aimed at prejudicing the outcome of the final status negotiations. Respect for the norms of international law, as well as respect for commitments, is the best way to ensure security and stability. If the present Israeli Government is truly serious in its quest for peace with the Palestinian side, it need only reaffirm its commitment to the provisions of the agreements signed and pursue a solution of the pending problems.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia reaffirms here the right of the Palestinians to self-determination and the establishment of their own independent State with Al-Quds al-Sharif as its capital. If the Israeli Government truly intends to attain a situation of mutual security with its neighbour, the Syrian Arab Republic, the Syrian Arab Government has always declared its readiness to resume negotiations with Israel from the point reached in prior negotiations. It behooves the Israeli side to accept that

Syrian positive initiative aimed at a peaceful and just solution to the conflict.

The end of the conditions of tension and the cycle of violence in southern Lebanon is contingent upon immediate Israeli withdrawal from that area of Lebanon and from Lebanese western Bekaa in implementation of Security Council resolution 425 (1978). We also urge the international community to act effectively in order to bring Israel to abide by its commitments as set out in several agreements.

The Government of Saudi Arabia gives a great deal of its attention to efforts to eliminate weapons of mass destruction from the Middle East, including the Arab Gulf, through its support for efforts by the League of Arab States, in accordance with the resolution adopted by the League itself at its 101st session. This resolution calls for making this sensitive region of the world free of weapons of mass destruction in all forms, nuclear, chemical and biological. We look forward to the concerted efforts of all the States of the region to achieve this goal in order to ensure stability and security for all, because this will have positive effects on the development of the region.

In this regard, we are deeply concerned to see that Israel rejects acceding to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) and remains outside international control in this area, thus presenting a grave threat to the region's security and stability. We reject the policy of double standards that we witness in the international community, which would exclude Israel from efforts to eliminate nuclear weapons from the region, thus encouraging an arms race in that region.

We are deeply convinced of the need to enhance the effectiveness of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons through strengthening the safeguards regime of the International Atomic Energy Agency and by universalizing this regime. However, we see the necessity of elaborating rules and criteria to promote the desired progress in all areas of disarmament with respect to weapons of mass destruction, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 1 (I) of 1946.

We therefore call upon Israel, the only State in the Middle East region which has not acceded to the NPT, to take the necessary measures to do so, and thus subject its nuclear installations to the international safeguards system, which will indeed contribute to bringing about regional and international security and stability.

The time has come for the Middle East to enjoy its share of peace and security and to channel all its energies towards stability, development and prosperity for its peoples. The Middle East is in a position to ensure a life of dignity for all of its inhabitants and to be an oasis of peace, prosperity and creativity, so that the region can once again become one of the main sources of human civilization, as it was in the past.

Mr. Sharma (India): On 30 October 1991, in his opening address on the Middle East Peace process, the Prime Minister of Spain, Felipe González, said,

> "On the eve of 1992, a year full of events, which marked past understandings and misunderstandings, which is pregnant with hope for all, we, as Spaniards, would like to continue to work with you to achieve a peace which can be a lasting one".

The peace process that began in Madrid gave new life to the effort to end the Arab-Israeli conflict, an effort which for many years has been a high priority of the international community. India has had a special interest in the resolution of this conflict. The Middle East is an extended neighbourhood for India and is of strategic, political, cultural and economic importance. Peace and development in the region are of vital concern to India. Peace in the Middle East need not be a dream. Peace is possible. But peace can be achieved only through direct negotiations; it cannot be imposed from the outside.

When the Madrid Middle East peace process was launched, it was envisaged as a process of direct negotiations proceeding along two tracks, one between Israel and the Arab States, and the other between Israel and the Palestinians. Negotiations were to be conducted on the basis of United Nations Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978), and the principle of land for peace.

Soon after bilateral talks commenced, parties were to convene also to organize multilateral negotiations which would focus on issues that cross national boundaries and are common to the region: arms control, water, refugee concerns and economic development. Multilateral negotiations were aimed at helping to create an atmosphere in which long-standing bilateral disputes could more easily be settled. Perhaps expectations at the time were too high. The decision of the Arab countries, in particular Syria and Lebanon, to participate in the Middle East peace process was a courageous step. India welcomed and supported their decision. It was widely expected that the negotiations would not be easy and smooth. Disagreements, criticisms, setbacks and interruptions would be there, but there was also hope that the parties would overcome them.

It is gratifying and to be welcomed that, despite obstacles and delays on the Palestinian track, the peace process has nevertheless remained on course. A major setback has been avoided by the signing of the Wye River Memorandum in Washington on 23 October 1998. We hope that further progress along the lines of the Memorandum will be smooth and that its implementation will facilitate final status negotiations.

However, the Syrian and Lebanese tracks have been stalemated for over two years. We believe that there has to be progress on both tracks if there is to be lasting peace. The region and its people need the establishment of a just and comprehensive peace. During this year's general debate in the General Assembly, we heard the Prime Ministers of Israel and Lebanon and the Foreign Minister of Syria eloquently reaffirming their commitment to peace. Peace is the strategic option they have chosen. We hope, therefore, that negotiations will be resumed from the point at which they stopped on the Syrian and Lebanese tracks and will continue to build on commitments and undertakings until a just and comprehensive peace is established in the region.

Mr. Burleigh (United States of America): The United States is proud to have once again worked closely with Russia and Norway on the draft resolution on the Middle East peace process. Our co-sponsors were dedicated and tireless in their efforts to reach agreement on a text supporting the peace process.

The situation regarding the peace process has changed significantly since the last session of the General Assembly. Yesterday, an extremely successful Conference to support Middle East Peace and Development was held in Washington. The Wye River Memorandum is being implemented; the Gaza airport is open; Israel has carried out the first of its further redeployments, as called for in the agreement; and Palestinians and Israelis have begun negotiations on permanent status.

Despite these developments, this body was unable to agree on a positive draft resolution to note the progress made by the parties to date. We find it inexplicable that the General Assembly could not encourage them to continue efforts to reach a just and lasting solution to the problems that still divide them or to express the strong support of the international community for that process.

We believe that the draft resolution entitled "The situation in the Middle East: the Syrian Golan", like others that deal with the long-standing Arab-Israeli dispute, serves only to complicate the achievement of a mutually acceptable outcome. Syria and Israel have committed themselves to a negotiating process to resolve their differences and achieve a lasting peace agreement. As a co-sponsor of the peace process begun in Madrid, the United States is firmly committed to helping the parties resolve their differences. However, we do not believe that draft resolutions such as these are conducive to creating an atmosphere that will help this process succeed.

As has been our practice in the past, the United States will abstain in the voting on the draft resolution concerning Jerusalem. Jerusalem and its future should be decided through permanent status negotiations, as agreed by the parties in their 13 September 1993 Declaration of Principles. This Assembly should not interject itself in this most complex and emotional issue.

Mr. Abulhasan (Kuwait) (*interpretation from Arabic*): The General Assembly is still considering the item on the situation in the Middle East, which was placed on the agenda in consequence of a conflict between the Arab States and Israel that erupted after Israel had usurped Palestinian land, and displaced or expelled the Palestinians from their homeland in 1948. The issue also arose because of the continued Israeli occupation since 1967 of Arab territories. The negative effects of that conflict have impacted all bases for the political and economic stability to which the people of the region have aspired in the past 50 years.

Despite all the significant positive changes that have taken place on the international scene, it is regrettable that the people of our region still live in a situation of war, at times, and of instability at other times, interspersed with periods of foreboding. There have been moments of optimism as well as of pessimism. Kuwait is one State in the region that feels acutely the negative results of a life of no war/no peace. It is a deplorable situation, which regrettably has become characteristic of life in our region today. Our people have begun to feel that they should adapt to and coexist with it.

Kuwait believes that this instability and tension in which the peoples of the region have been living, particularly in the past few years, are the result of frustration generated by successive Israeli Governments that have adopted colonial and settlerist policies and have tried to thwart the peace process begun on various tracks in Madrid in 1991. This situation has also been the result of the current Israeli Government's flouting of the fundamental principles underlying the peace process and shirking all commitments and undertakings, particularly the agreements signed with the Palestinian Authority in 1993. Moreover, Israel has pursued unilateral arbitrary policies and practices on the ground that run flagrantly counter to the principles on which the Madrid peace process is based. That process still enjoys the support of the Arab States, which insist and adhere to it just as they adhere to the provisions of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978), which are all based on the principle of land for peace.

Kuwait welcomed the agreement between the Palestinian Authority and the Israeli Government in late October 1998, signed at Wye River in the United States. This constituted a step towards full implementation of the agreements signed between the Palestinian Authority and Israel on the road to a final settlement between the two parties. In this connection, we wish to pay tribute to the role played by the United States of America in advancing the negotiations between the Palestinian Authority and Israel. In this connection, we pay tribute to President Bill Clinton, whose efforts culminated in the signing of the memorandum of understanding which we hope will be fully respected so that the peace process will have a chance to move ahead and a swift and comprehensive solution of the Palestinian question can be achieved. This would enable the Palestinian people to exercise their legitimate rights, including their right to self-determination, to return home and to establish their own independent State, with Jerusalem as its capital.

We believe that successful implementation of the recent memorandum of understanding and the earlier agreements will depend on the goodwill of Israel in implementing these agreements, and its ability to abandon its settlement and expansionist policies in the occupied territories, particularly in the city of Jerusalem. Israel must respect Arab and Muslim sensitivities on these matters by ceasing its practices with regard to extending the municipal boundaries of Jerusalem and by abandoning its attempts to change the demographic composition of Jerusalem, with a view to its Judaization. Such practices constitute a flagrant violation of international legitimacy and a blatant contravention of the framework of the Madrid Conference and of all relevant Security Council and General Assembly resolutions.

Kuwait reaffirms today its support for sisterly Syria and Lebanon, and expresses the hope that the United States, in its capacity as co-sponsor of the peace process, will bring the same pressure to bear on Israel as it did recently during the Israeli discussions with the Palestinian Authority with a view to forcing Israel to respect the principles underlying the peace process. This should particularly apply to the land-for-peace principle, the return to negotiations along the Syrian-Lebanese tracks from the point at which they had been previously suspended, and full Israeli withdrawal from the occupied Syrian Golan Heights to the lines of 4 June 1967, as well as from southern Lebanon, in accordance with Security Council resolution 425 (1978).

Kuwait stills maintains that Israeli withdrawal from the Syrian Golan Heights will be a test of the sincerity of Israel's desire for a just, comprehensive and lasting peace with the Arab States. We also support the position of our brothers in Lebanon in their deep concern at attempts by the Israeli Government to set conditions on the implementation of Security Council resolution 425 (1978) regarding Israeli withdrawal from southern Lebanon and its western Bekaa. We reject any interpretation whereby conditions are placed on the implementation of that resolution. We also call on Israel to respect the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Lebanon and to stop exploiting its occupation of southern Lebanon by stealing its resources and thwarting its means of development. Kuwait, basing itself on its close link with Lebanon, will continue to support all efforts at development currently under way with a view to reconstructing Lebanon in an era of peace.

In conclusion, I wish to reaffirm my country's consistent position in favour of advancing the peace process in the Middle East because it is an irreversible strategic option designed to achieve stability and sustainable development, to which all our peoples have aspired for the last 50 years.

Mr. Vural (Turkey): Our discussion on the situation in the Middle East this year is taking place in a relatively promising environment. The signing of the Wye River Memorandum and the implementation of its first phase have reopened the long-stalled peace process.

We congratulate the leaders of Israel and Palestine for their courageous and wise stand, which has made this breakthrough possible. Those who have inspired, sponsored and supported the Wye River meetings — the United States Administration and President Clinton primarily — also deserve our high praise. It is our sincere expectation that both the Israeli and the Palestinian leadership will remain engaged in the full implementation of the Oslo accords. International, political and economic support to the continuation of this process will be as important as the initial backing it has received. My Government is committed to doing its part in this respect.

The situation in the Middle East and the delicate nature of the peace process require our constant attention. The recent positive developments should not lead the parties and the international community to ignore the existence of the three major obstacles before the peace process: Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978) remain to be implemented; terrorism, violence and extremism continue to be serious risk factors for peace and stability; and, finally, economic deprivation, unless urgently attended to, could very well undermine diplomatic and political achievements.

There is no doubt that the parties to the peace process still have considerable obligations and responsibilities to fulfil. Discontinuation of the illegal Israeli settlement activities in the occupied territories, including Jerusalem, is a priority in this respect. It is regrettable that these illegal and provocative activities have continued in defiance of the strong appeals of the international community and several Security Council and General Assembly resolutions.

The Wye River process should also inspire the parties of the two other bilateral tracks of the peace process, namely, Israel, Syria and Lebanon. They should be able to resume negotiations on the basis of the principles of the Madrid Peace Conference and the relevant Security Council resolutions.

Terrorist activities and threats, sponsored or encouraged by States in some cases, have undermined peace efforts in the past and can do so in the future. Terrorism should be condemned, and every measure should be taken against this threat to peace, stability and security. Parties should also refrain from acts and statements which might incite hatred and violence.

As collateral damage of the impasse in the bilateral tracks of the peace process, the spirit of cooperation which had been developed on the multilateral tracks has unfortunately faded away. There is an urgent need to restore such cooperation. Resumption of multilateral talks on various issues, such as disarmament, economic development, water, environment and refugees, with the full participation of all the parties to the process, remains a major task.

Another adverse consequence of the political impasse has been the discontinuation of the Middle East and North Africa Economic Summit meetings. Such meetings are very important and promising forums for designing the future of economic and commercial cooperation in the region. The peace process would be incomplete without such initiatives, which include private sectors along with Government agencies. Necessary political conditions must be created to give a new and fresh impetus to the economic summits and to other similar initiatives. The rebuilding of the multilateral dimension of the peace process must extend to further confidence-building measures and culminate in a new framework for security and cooperation in the region.

Throughout history, the Middle East has contributed immensely to our material and spiritual enrichment, both as individual human beings and as societies. A fertile land for the culture of tolerance, peace and prosperity has turned into the battlefields of the twentieth century. The peoples of the region have been victims of endless wars and conflicts.

The only way to turn this tide is the continuation and successful completion of the peace process. There is no alternative. Both the parties directly involved and the international community must help the Middle East regain its spiritual and material prominence in the international system, which it so deserves.

Ms. Arystanbekova (Kazakhstan): Kazakhstan fully supports the efforts of the States of the region and the members of the international community to revive and continue the peace process in the Middle East. Kazakhstan, as a major Eurasian State which is making an important contribution to global and regional security, takes a constant interest in the development of the Middle East peace process. My country consistently advocates the implementation by the parties of the General Assembly and Security Council resolutions relating to a peaceful settlement in the Middle East, and firmly supports the positive changes that are taking place in that respect.

The news of the signing, on 23 October this year, of the Wye River Memorandum between the Government of Israel and the Palestine National Authority was received with profound satisfaction in Kazakhstan. As the report of the Secretary-General on agenda items 39 and 40 (A/53/652) emphasizes, the Memorandum complements and adds details to the accords that the parties concluded in the past and, more importantly, paves the way to permanent status negotiations. We are in agreement with the view expressed by the Secretary-General in his report that the signing of the Memorandum by the parties is a promising development.

The Wye River agreement is regarded in Kazakhstan as an important contribution to the continuation of the peace process. It offers tangible hope for the establishment of a lasting peace in the Middle East and will facilitate the creation of conditions conducive to the further continuation of the Israeli-Palestinian talks and the ultimate settlement of the Middle East problem.

The leadership of the Republic of Kazakhstan pays tribute to the political far-sightedness and public-spirited courage of Mr. Yasser Arafat and Mr. Benjamin Netanyahu, who have achieved such impressive success with the assistance of the United States and the other countries sponsoring the Middle East peace process. Kazakhstan is convinced that the further consolidation of the peace agreements reached between Israel and Palestine and a speedy settlement of the situation in the Middle East are in the interests, in the first place, of the States of the Middle East region, and of the international community as a whole.

Kazakhstan supports the efforts of the participants in the Middle East peace process and considers that the attainment of a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the region is possible only on the basis of peace negotiations, of balancing the interests of all the parties and, above all, of the exercise of the lawful right of the Palestinian people to establish an independent State.

We call on all the countries of the region to demonstrate goodwill and wisdom in the search for ways of settling the points at issue, and we believe that there is a need for the parties to continue to abide by the decisions of the Madrid Peace Conference and the fundamental principles set forth in Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973). We are also in agreement with the view that the situation in the Middle East cannot be finally resolved without real progress being made on the Israel-Lebanon track, on the basis of Security Council resolution 425 (1978), and on the Israel-Syria track.

Kazakhstan is of the opinion that the participants in the Middle East peace process must abide strictly by their obligations stemming from the agreements signed earlier and refrain from taking unilateral actions that could impair the peace process in the Middle East.

The United Nations has an important role to play in the attainment of peace and stability in the Middle East region. Kazakhstan greatly appreciates the recent efforts by the United Nations and the Member States sponsoring the Middle East peace process, which led to the results that have been achieved. In this connection, we also share the gratitude of the parties to the Secretary-General for his objective and detailed reports on the situation in the region and his efforts to promote a peaceful settlement in the Middle East.

Kazakhstan expresses its readiness to continue to extend every possible support to the further development of the process of a peaceful settlement in the Middle East, taking into account the interests of all the parties.

Mr. Ka (Senegal) (*interpretation from French*): The General Assembly is once again discussing the situation in the Middle East, this year in a specific context characterized both by grounds for hope for the normal continuation of the peace process and by fears of a possible impasse in the negotiating process.

After the historic breakthrough of the Oslo accords, the 1993 Declaration of Principles and the series of arrangements that followed, and after the achievements built up by the Palestinians and the Israelis between 1991 and 1996, the international community was entitled to believe that its dreams of peace were going to come true.

But suddenly, in late 1996, the peace process, conceived of as an irreversible strategic political choice, encountered difficulties. A series of illegal administrative and legislative measures taken by the occupying Power, in violation of the Geneva Convention of 12 August 1949 and the relevant resolutions of the Security Council, as well as the numerous obstacles to the implementation of agreements already concluded, began to threaten the building of the peace.

Continual frustrations, denials of basic human rights, frequent blockades of Palestinian territories, the stifling of the Palestinian economy, the constant deterioration in living and working conditions and the unjustified confiscation of Palestinian and Arab lands to build settlements have exasperated the Palestinian and

Arab populations of the occupied territories, who had placed so much hope in the peace of the brave.

With so many obstacles, the peace process ended up being plunged into a relative lethargy, which lasted at least nine months.

This paralysis in the peace process was a source of concern to the entire international community and, more specifically, to the Security Council and the General Assembly, both of which adopted a number of resolutions recommending that measures be taken to save the peace and, above all, to ensure that the occupying Power complied with its commitments.

Several initiatives were launched during this period of lethargy in the peace process in order to bring the negotiations out of deadlock.

Today, we welcome the signing on 23 October 1998 of the Wye River Memorandum, concluded thanks to the courageous and resolute efforts of President Clinton and King Hussein of Jordan. The conclusion of that Memorandum is a positive step in that it has made it possible to unblock the peace process and bring the parties back to the negotiating table.

We are particularly gladdened by this significant progress in the search for a peaceful and lasting settlement to the question of Palestine, for, I repeat once again, the Palestinian crisis is indeed at the heart of the Middle East conflict.

We venture to hope that the parties involved will take advantage of this new triumph of — or at least breakthrough towards — peace, and that the measures laid down, as well as the earlier provisions of the Oslo and Washington, D.C., agreements, will be implemented fully and in good faith.

If they do so the parties will dispel the reasons for our fears. They will strengthen our reasons to hope for a normal continuation of the peace process. They will enable the region to experience a new dawn of peace. They will foster secure coexistence for the Israeli, Palestinian and Arab peoples and will stimulate the development of all the economic and cultural potential of the region.

As I have often stated, the region of the Middle East is the crossroads of history and of the world, but too often it has been a theatre of armed conflict. Too often it has seen bloodshed. Now it must live in peace, and to accomplish that it is essential that the crises that afflict it be settled peacefully and with respect for the rights and the dignity of the peoples that make up the region.

Neither provocative measures nor the daily frustrations of Arab populations, nor the establishment of settlements in Jerusalem or elsewhere, nor imprisonment, nor any form of deprivation can ensure the security of the populations of the region. Only peace can bring security for all, and only security can, in turn, maintain peace.

The international community has often recalled that establishing settlements in East Jerusalem and the occupied Palestinian and Arab territories must be halted, along with illegal measures and the policy of fait accompli, because they jeopardize future negotiations on the final status.

The international community has on many occasions recommended that an urgent solution be found for returning the Syrian Golan and for withdrawing Israeli forces from Lebanese territory, in accordance with the relevant Security Council resolutions.

My delegation believes that it is time to establish the conditions for starting negotiations on the final status so as to enable the Palestinian people to exercise in peace their right to self-determination and independence and to regain their dignity, in accordance with international legitimacy.

The United Nations, together with the sponsors of the peace process and the European Union could make a major contribution to fostering a climate of trust and measures of trust between the parties so that the various negotiations among the various protagonists involved can continue and lead swiftly to a lasting, peaceful political settlement.

Mr. Elaraby (Egypt) *(interpretation from Arabic)*: In my statement before the General Assembly this morning I dealt with Egypt's perspective on the Palestinian-Israeli negotiating track. I also referred to Egypt's views concerning the illegal measures taken by Israel with the aim of pre-empting the final status negotiations and voiding them of all content.

Egypt considers that the question of Palestine is at the crux of the Arab-Israeli conflict and that peace will not be achieved between the Arab States and Israel until after a just and lasting settlement of this central issue has been attained.

In dealing with the item on the situation in the Middle East, Egypt believes that the establishment of a comprehensive peace in the region comprises a number of elements of equal importance, namely, the complete withdrawal from all occupied Arab territories, the establishment of normal relations between the Arab States and Israel and the framing of mutual security arrangements. These are the bases which must be taken into account. Until an equation that takes into account all these elements is arrived at, the Israeli side must refrain from taking any measures that contravene international law and United Nations resolutions.

Arab participation in the 1991 Madrid Conference was founded on acceptance of negotiations on the basis of Security Council resolution 242 (1967), which is in turn based on the principle of land for peace. This is the pivot of the peace process involving Israel and Syria and Israel and Lebanon.

Turning to the Syrian track, the current Israeli Government refuses to recognize the progress that had been made in negotiations between Syria and the previous Israeli Government. This gives rise to grave doubt about the Israeli Government's intentions with respect to ending its occupation of the Syrian Golan and reaching a genuine peace with Syria on the basis of the principle of land for peace. Here I wish to reaffirm Egypt's position, which is in full support of Syria's right to regain the Golan in its entirety; this is the only way to bring about peace between Syria and Israel.

On the Lebanese track, Egypt has followed with great concern all that has taken place in occupied southern Lebanon, including the events of the last few days. In this context, I reaffirm Egypt's position in support of Lebanon's insistence that Israel fully implement Security Council 425 (1978). Egypt is convinced that Israel's complete and unconditional withdrawal from southern Lebanon would build confidence, reduce tension and create greater stability; it would indeed be a prelude to peace between Lebanon and Israel.

Egypt sees a link between progress on the various bilateral negotiating tracks on the one hand and the numerous forms of regional cooperation on the other. The orientation of the Middle East towards peace is an indivisible whole. Relations of cooperation between the Arab States and Israel, whether economic or otherwise, can neither be established nor develop with the peace process in its present situation and with Israel's continued intransigence and its persistent refusal to end its occupation of Arab territories.

Egypt hopes for genuine positive developments in the peace process that could herald regional cooperation based on the solid foundation of the needs of the States of the region themselves, not on something imposed from outside. Thus, there is an organic and unbreakable link between the establishment of a just, comprehensive and lasting peace on the one hand and the promotion of joint regional economic cooperation benefitting all the States of the region without discrimination on the other.

Egypt believes that the establishment of a just and comprehensive peace would be the true basis for the establishment of security in its broadest sense for all the parties in the Middle East.

On that basis, Egypt continues to call for a Middle East free from nuclear weapons. That initiative began in the General Assembly in 1974; the Assembly has adopted resolutions on that subject annually since 1980. Since 1990, and in the framework of an initiative by President Mubarak, Egypt has been calling for the establishment in the Middle East of a zone free of all weapons of mass destruction. Here I would note Israel's persistent refusal to enter into any arrangement or to take any step that would help build confidence: it rejects the inspection of its nuclear facilities. This adds to the political tension in a region where heightened tension already prevails.

In order to establish peace in the Middle East, mighty efforts must be made by the States of the region and by peace-loving States outside the region. In that connection, Egypt would like to state its appreciation for the role played by the United States, the members of the European Union, the Russian Federation and Norway to revive and restore the peace process.

The Arab States have chosen peace as their strategic option since the Arab Summit held in Egypt in 1996. That choice remains in place.

In conclusion, I reaffirm that the establishment of a just peace requires that Israel too adopt an outlook focused on the benefits that could be derived from peace. This requires faith in the feasibility of peace, so that the region will never return to the confrontation and tension that prevailed in an earlier stage that we had hoped would by now be ended.

Mr. Mubarak (Lebanon) (*interpretation from Arabic*): Lebanon has suffered more than any other State as a result of the Arab-Israeli conflict. In our view, we have much to gain from the achievement of a just, lasting and comprehensive peace, a peace we seek for the region on the basis of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978). My delegation reiterates Lebanon's sincere commitment to the peace process that began at Madrid in 1991. We accepted the initiative of the co-sponsors of the peace process, the United States of America and the then Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, on the basis of Security Council resolution 425 (1978).

But for 20 years Israel has been refusing to implement that resolution. It continues to occupy parts of southern Lebanon and to launch daily attacks against innocent civilians. Lebanon has consistently called for the implementation of Security Council resolution 425 (1978), which reaffirms the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Lebanon and calls upon Israel unconditionally to withdraw from Lebanon to the internationally recognized boundaries.

Let me make it clear once again that Lebanon categorically rejects any "new" old offer that would split the Lebanese and Syrian negotiating tracks. We stress our absolute rejection of rumours in the media concerning questionable "Lebanon first" plans that would reproduce the agreement of 17 May 1983, which we have rejected both in spirit and in letter. We insist on full solidarity and strict coordination between ourselves and Syria on our common negotiating process. It is no secret that the Syrian and Lebanese tracks are of strategic importance for the success of the peace talks. If that basic fact is ignored, the situation will continue to deteriorate. There will be no peace in the region so long as Israel shirks its duty to commit itself to international law and the Madrid principles, specifically the principle of land for peace, and the consequent withdrawal from occupied Arab territories, including unconditional withdrawal from Lebanon to the internationally recognized boundaries in accordance with Security Council resolution 425 (1978), as well as withdrawal from the Golan to the line of 4 June 1967 in accordance with Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973).

Israel's occupation of southern Lebanon since 1978 has brought destruction and tragedy to my country. Neither the 1978 invasion, known at the time as Operation Litani, nor the 1982 invasion, known as Operation Peace for Galilee, has brought Israel security. Indeed, occupation has created more complications, in addition to massive suffering. The violence in southern Lebanon reaffirms the complete failure of the concept of the so-called security zone created by Israel. Furthermore, the many raids carried out daily by Israel north of the security zone also reaffirm beyond doubt the failure of that concept.

Everyone no doubt remembers the aggression perpetrated by Israel against Lebanon in June 1996 under the code name Grapes of Wrath. Those "grapes" reached dozens of villages in the south, as well as many infrastructures deep in Lebanese territory. Everyone must have seen on their television screens pictures of villages totally razed to the ground. With their own eyes everyone saw tens of thousands of innocent civilians fleeing the bombs lobbed and the missiles launched by aircraft, warships and tanks, sparing nothing and no one. They followed and attacked civilian vehicles running in all directions. International public opinion was shocked when it saw the bombing of an ambulance carrying children, homes destroyed over the heads of their inhabitants and innocent people buried alive under the rubble. The world's conscience was shaken when Israeli artillery hit the United Nations headquarters in Qana and the limbs of 110 civilians were strewn in all directions, most of them belonging to women and children who had sought refuge there, thinking that they would be safe from Israel's "grapes of destruction" under the protection of those who watched over international peace and security.

Everyone remembers the General Assembly's condemnation of Israeli aggression against Lebanon. Nevertheless, Israel continues to ignore the will of the international community, which demands its unconditional withdrawal from Lebanese territory. Israel continues to threaten again our infrastructures and to plunge Beirut into darkness and thirst. It does not shy away from stealing the soil from our farms or from accusing those who resist its occupation soldiers, armed with guns, tanks and other equipment, of being terrorists.

The Commission on Human Rights, which has adopted many resolutions relating to human rights issues in southern Lebanon, has clearly reaffirmed that Israel is violating the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the 1949 Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War and the Hague Rules of 1907. Lebanese detainees in detention camps administered by Israel in southern Lebanon — particularly the Al-Khiam detention camp — continue to suffer from arbitrary detention. We once again renew our demand for their immediate release.

The grapes of wrath fell, and Israeli practices thereafter led to the dropping off of the last fig leaf. Israel is now completely naked in its flagrant and constant violation of all moral values and of international law. The extent of Israel's aggressive intentions and the depth of its hatred towards the inhabitants of the region have been revealed. Israel does not yet comprehend that the policy of fire and steel will not establish peace. We have repeatedly stated publicly and in the Security Council that this policy will only lead to destruction and death and that its perpetrators will only be shamed and brought down. Once more, we reaffirm the need to implement resolution 425 (1978), which alone can guarantee the return of tranquility and stability to southern Lebanon. We also reaffirm the right of our people to resist Israeli occupation in southern Lebanon and in the western Bekaa. That right is based on international law and resolutions of international legitimacy, as well as dozens of declarations made by international forums — including the Declaration on the Occasion of the Fiftieth Anniversary of the United Nations, which had the blessing of over 130 heads of State or Government. Our people are exercising their natural right to free their land from the stigma of Israeli occupation, which, under international law, is indeed the ugliest form of terrorist practice.

The Israeli Government continues to say "no" to the Madrid principles, "no" to land for peace, "no" to returning to the negotiating table from the point where negotiations with the previous Israeli Government were suspended, and "no" the implementation of commitments it has already made. It does, however, say "yes" to the building of dozens of new settlements in the West Bank and the Golan Heights, "yes" to the expansion of dozens of existing settlements, "yes" to the confiscation of more land belonging to the Arab inhabitants of the occupied territories, "yes" to the stifling of the Arab identity of Jerusalem, and "yes" to further threats, muscle-flexing and escalation of tension.

This is an irresponsible Government based on the language of violence, escalation, settlerism, expansion and the rejection of the principles of settlement and of the language of peace and conciliation. We have new evidence on a daily basis of Israel's threats and arbitrary practices, as well as its endless violations of the Geneva Conventions of 1949 — particularly the Fourth Geneva Convention — and the principles of international law.

We must once again repeat that multilateral negotiations will not succeed as long as Israel does not withdraw from occupied Arab land. All these ceremonial occasions, which give the impression that the peace process is in progress, are to no avail as long as Israel refuses to heed international law and the bases of the Madrid process. We are fully convinced that the multilateral talks that have taken place to date are premature. They will not bear fruit, as long as the bilateral tracks do not bring about the results that are desired and that are required by international law and the Madrid principles.

Secondly, we believe that the Security Council is the primary international body mandated with defending States from aggression and ensuring that its resolutions are followed up until they are implemented. The role of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) is central and essential to the implementation of resolution 425 (1978). We therefore renew the call for the maintenance of the size and effectiveness of the Force, especially in the light of the important role required of it in this regard. We take this opportunity to thank UNIFIL for all the sacrifices it has made since 1978. We would also like to express our deep appreciation to the States that contribute to UNIFIL.

Thirdly, I would like to renew Lebanon's commitment to the Palestinian people's attainment of their legitimate national aspirations, as well as their right to self-determination and to their own State. We call for the full implementation of resolution 194 (III), which clearly and unambiguously reaffirms the right of Palestinians to return to their homes.

Lebanon categorically rejects any attempts to settle permanently in Lebanon any Palestinians who are currently on its territory. This firm position has been made concrete in the Lebanese Constitution, in accordance with the Taif Agreement of 1989. It also represents the national consensus of the Lebanese people.

As to Jerusalem, we reaffirm that Israel's decision to impose its laws, jurisdiction, and administration over the city of Al-Quds al-Sharif — Jerusalem — is an illegal decision, and thus is null and void, and has no legitimacy whatsoever. Many resolutions have been adopted by the Security Council and the General Assembly reaffirming this fact, including Security Council resolutions 252 (1968), 267 (1969), 271 (1969), 298(1971) and 476 (1975). We look to those who continue to regard the issue from an objective point of view and who state that Jerusalem is at the very core of the Palestinian question. We cannot accept any measures that detract from the character of this Holy City, a city where Arab inhabitants are subjected to many pressures to leave their city in an attempt to change the demographic status and social situation there.

We would also like to draw attention to the danger of the many continuing archaeological activities threatening the Al-Aqsa Mosque and other major sites of importance to Muslims and Christians in the city. We also denounce the fact that some States have transferred their diplomatic missions to Jerusalem, in violation of Security Council resolution 478 (1980), the provisions of which they refuse to abide by. We call upon those States to commit to the implementation of the relevant United Nations resolutions in accordance with the Charter of the Organization.

As for the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), it will have no effect whatsoever in the region as long as Israel refuses to adhere to the Treaty and as long as Israel continues to threaten the region with its nuclear arsenal, in flagrant violation of international law and the relevant resolutions of the United Nations and specialized agencies. Israel must heed the will of the international community as provided for in international law and relevant Security Council resolutions. Only this will guarantee a just, comprehensive and durable peace in the region.

Peace and prosperity are all we ask for. However, we ask for it to be based on the Madrid principles and international legitimacy as well as the principle of land for peace. Lebanon has suffered from a war that continued for several years and ended only eight years ago. We aspire to reconstruct our country and to give our children a better future. This will not be possible as long as peace in the region is not durable, just and comprehensive, and as long as this peace is not based on the principles of international law and the Charter and resolutions of the United Nations.

The regrettable current condition of the peace process which we are witnessing today will continue so long as Israel continues to treat the process in such an irresponsible fashion. Israel will continue to undermine this process, which will have grave repercussions, not only for the parties but, indeed, for the entire international community.

The time has come for Israel to be made to understand that there will be no peace without the full restitution of the land. We call on the sponsors of the peace process to set things moving in the right direction before it is too late.

Mr. Petrella (Argentina) (*interpretation from Spanish*): Unlike one year ago, today we can say that there has been a change of expectations with respect to the peace process in the Middle East, and there is now reason to be moderately optimistic.

The parties seem to have come together again and — not without effort and certainly thanks to the required reciprocal concessions — to have found the way to a negotiated solution to the Palestinian issue. We believe that the Wye River Memorandum, signed 23 October 1998, provides new and vital impetus to the peace process and is an important generator of trust between the parties. This document shows further that when there is a genuine will to negotiate and an openness to compromise it is always possible to reach an understanding.

We are aware that important issues remain to be resolved. Therefore, we ask the parties to persevere on the path they have once again chosen to travel together, beginning with the Wye River Memorandum; to continue to reinforce through concrete acts the climate of mutual trust necessary to the success of all negotiations; and to firmly resist the provocations of extremists on either side who are trying to bring about a collapse of the peace process that was begun in Madrid in 1991.

We wish to repeat once again our firm conviction that there are no alternatives to peace in the Middle East. The comprehensive implementation in good faith of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1967) and 425 (1978) and the Oslo agreements will allow talks to begin as soon as possible on the delicate questions regarding final status.

Therefore, we urge the parties to refrain from any and all acts that prejudge the final status of the territories. Accordingly, we feel that the building of settlements in the occupied territories, including in East Jerusalem, is a unilateral measure that is contrary to international law and that affects the results of the negotiations. For this reason we urge that these measures be reconsidered, taking into account their negative effects in the light of Israel's basic and permanent interest in living in peace with its neighbours.

At the same time, Argentina unequivocally condemns all acts of violence — acts that have claimed numerous victims among the civilian population. Terrorism is never an effective or acceptable response. The use of terrorism endangers the continuation of the peace process. Argentina wishes to reiterate clearly and emphatically the right of the State of Israel to live within secure and internationally recognized boundaries, without being subjected to acts or threats of acts of violence.

The bilateral negotiations are the engine for the peace process. Accordingly, we wish to express our deepest appreciation to President Clinton of the United States of America and to his Secretary of State, Madeleine Albright, for their work this past October to rescue the negotiations from as they were going through one of their most delicate phases.

Though bilateral negotiation is absolutely essential, the United Nations has a special historical responsibility to Palestine — a responsibility that has manifested itself over the course of 50 years in the establishment of peacekeeping operations, in uninterrupted assistance to the Palestinian refugees and in the personal commitment to peace of its Secretaries-General.

Argentina understands that peace and development are inseparable elements. Faithful to this concept, we have participated from the outset in peacekeeping operations, and, more recently, through the "White Helmets" initiative, we have cooperated on specific programmes for human development on the West Bank and in Gaza.

The comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the region demanded by the resolutions of the Security Council and of this Assembly will not be realized unless there is sustained and concurrent progress on all the tracks of the peace process. Therefore, we cannot hide our concern at the lack of dialogue between Syria and Israel regarding the Golan Heights. We urge both parties to resume this dialogue in a frank manner and a constructive spirit.

Regrettably, the situation in southern Lebanon also remains unresolved. Argentina wishes to reconfirm its commitment to the territorial integrity, political independence and full sovereignty of Lebanon and to reiterate the need to implement Security Council resolution 425 (1978) effectively.

I would like to conclude by asking the parties to take advantage of this new opportunity for peace, to continue on the path set out in Madrid in 1991 and confirmed at Wye Plantation in 1998. This is the path of law, understanding and respect for each other's existence. In short, it is the path of genuine reconciliation between peoples.

Mr. Abu-Nimah (Jordan)(*interpretation from Arabic*): The question of the Middle East, at the core of which is the question of Palestine, remains an important item on the agenda of this Organization. Despite the progress made on the Palestinian-Israeli track with the signing of the Wye River Memorandum on 23 October 1998, and despite the beginning of the implementation of some of the elements of the Wye agreement, which we consider to be an important, positive development that will put the peace process back on the right track after a stalemate that lasted nearly two years, it is our hope that even more achievements will be made on the road to peace. It is also our hope that we will draw closer to peace seven years after the beginning of the process at Madrid.

His Majesty King Hussein left his hospital treatment programme under extremely delicate circumstances to go to Wye Plantation and to contribute for two consecutive days to the efforts made to arrive at an agreement. These noble and sincere efforts of His Majesty made a clear contribution to the settlement of acute differences and to overcoming the grave obstacles that remained for a number of days and nights, after which agreement was reached. All the participating parties have testified to the importance and the effectiveness of the efforts made by His Majesty. This bears testimony to the commitment of the King, the leadership and the people of Jordan to continue to work for the establishment of the desired peace in all parts of our region. It gives me pleasure to express my thanks to the delegations of the friendly and sisterly countries that expressed their appreciation in their statements before the General Assembly for the role played by His Majesty King Hussein for the success of these talks.

By participating in the debate on this item, my delegation reaffirms its belief in the role of the United Nations and its clear responsibilities for the peace process, as well as in the need to reinvigorate its role in supporting and complementing the efforts currently being made to free the peace process from the stalemate which has impeded its progress. The United Nations is the true foundation of international legitimacy. It is the one body that adopts firm resolutions concerning international conflicts and questions. It is the one organ that firmly and determinedly imposes on its Members compliance with its will and implementation of its resolutions. The peace process is based on United Nations resolutions, and Security Council resolution 242 (1967) is the very foundation of that process, whereby the door to peace was opened in 1967. With its implementation in letter and spirit, we will arrive at the desired peace. However, that resolution and others adopted by the Security Council and the General Assembly have yet to be implemented by Israel, despite the adoptions and reaffirmations in every session of this Assembly over dozens of years.

The question of peace in the Middle East is the highest of Jordan's concerns. Our contribution to peaceful action to settle this question has been well known since 1948. In international relations, Jordan has adopted an approach that stems from the spirit of the Charter, and it believes in peaceful settlement of all international problems under all circumstances and at all times. On more than one occasion before this Assembly, we have reaffirmed that Jordan understands peace as being just, lasting and comprehensive. This is the same understanding shared by the majority of international parties, particularly those directly concerned with the question of the Middle East. Our commitment to peace within this understanding is a strategic commitment, based on our conviction that peace represents a basic need for all the States and peoples of the region. When that peace is achieved, it will constitute a radical turning point in the history of the region. It will constitute a way towards new horizons that augur well for the countries and the peoples of the region and will promise them stability, security and peaceful coexistence — indeed, the normal life of which they have been deprived for almost six decades.

Therefore, in the autumn of 1994, Jordan signed a Treaty of Peace with Israel on the basis of our belief that it would steer matters onto the right track, that it would turn over a new leaf of relations of good neighbourliness between the two countries and that it would establish the principles and the bases of cooperation and interaction in various fields. In Jordan, we took a keen interest in opening the door to peace without reservation and without rejecting any of the aspects of full, normal relations, so that the Israeli-Jordanian peace would be an example to be followed. We also did this so that the position of Jordan would be a model of commitment to the provisions of agreements and their implementation in letter and in spirit, their translation into a tangible reality. This was done in order to assure our neighbours in Israel that peace is neither a document that we sign as an end in itself nor a means of consolidating the causes of conflict or the gains of war. In fact, peace, as we understand it, is a reality, a practice, interaction and cooperation based on the principles of mutual respect, honouring commitments and acting faithfully and responsibly to implement them.

There was great hope that this Treaty would be followed by progress on the Syrian and Lebanese tracks with Israel in order to achieve comprehensiveness and to start the process of economic and developmental reconstruction in the region as a whole. Unfortunately, this has so far not been achieved, for very well-known reasons, the clearest of which is that the basic principles on which the peace process are based, such as the principle of land for peace, have not been implemented. The Arab territories continue to languish under the yoke of occupation, and the international agreements and resolutions achieved have not yet been implemented.

At the end of the discussion on this item last year, the General Assembly adopted resolution 52/52. Paragraph 3 of that resolution stressed the necessity of commitment to the principle of land for peace and the implementation of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), which form the basis of the Middle East peace process, as well as the need for the immediate and meticulous implementation of the agreements reached between the two parties. The resolution enjoyed the support of an overwhelming majority, thus reaffirming the Assembly's conviction of the need to implement these principles. In the same resolution, the Assembly reaffirmed the illegality of the Israeli settlements established in the territories occupied since 1967, as well as the illegality of the Israeli measures aimed at altering the status of Jerusalem.

We wonder if any part of these provisions has been implemented. The painful reality is that matters continue to go in the opposite direction. The report of the Secretary-General dated 10 November 1998 (A/53/652) contained a note verbale addressed to him on 9 October 1998 by the Permanent Observer of Palestine, which refers to the continued illegal activities of Israel in the West Bank, including Jerusalem.

Yesterday, Ambassador John de Saram, Chairman of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories, told us during the observance of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, that conditions in the occupied territories have not improved, as had been hoped, and that fear, hopelessness and frustration have taken hold.

Among the pretexts used by Israel to justify its actions is the issue of security. The issue of security, which has been raised by Israel, is of understandable concern. In fact, it is one of the most important objectives of the peace that we strive to achieve for all States and peoples in the region. It cannot be achieved, however, through the failure to implement the agreements reached between Israel and the Palestinians, nor by escalating practices denying the Palestinians their rights and dashing their hopes. Security cannot be achieved through continued Israeli settlement in the occupied Arab territories, be it by expanding the existing settlements or by constructing new ones. In either case, the result is the same. Security cannot be achieved by pursuing a policy of confiscating land, demolishing Arab homes, withdrawing identity cards, isolating Jerusalem from the rest of the West Bank, restricting the freedom of movement of the Palestinians and keeping thousands in detention camps nor by allowing the Israeli security forces to use physical violence, tantamount to torture during the investigation of the accused. Such behaviour violates the most basic rules of respect for human rights and justice, and the civilized world resolutely rejects and condemns it.

The peace we aim to achieve is one that is just, lasting and comprehensive. How can it be achieved if the territory is not returned to its legitimate owners? How can the land be returned if settlement and the creation of new facts on the ground continue? How can we be convinced that such peace is Israel's ultimate objective when it issues official declarations reaffirming the continued policy of settling the occupied Arab territories and calling on the settlers to occupy the Arab territories to prevent their restoration to their Palestinian owners? These declarations have had an extremely negative impact on the climate of confidence that we have worked to create for the attainment of a peace that would enable the peoples of the region to heal the wounds and transcend the tragedies of the past and to move towards a future of cooperation, reconciliation, harmony and hope. Peace can be achieved not by consolidating the causes of conflict, but by eliminating them. It cannot be achieved by seizing land, expanding settlements, or denying the rights of the other party. It can be achieved only through justice. Justice is the basis of peace and peace is the basis of security.

The Israeli-Palestinian accords of 1993 deferred certain questions — such as settlements, Jerusalem and refugees — to the final status negotiations. It is therefore natural and axiomatic to leave those matters deferred and untouched. The deferral must not be tampered with pending the date agreed upon for negotiation. It cannot be exploited as an opportunity to change facts on the ground in favour of the occupier, thus making a solution more difficult, more complex, and even more impossible to achieve. We believe that the deferral of the negotiations on these important matters, which are at the core of the conflict, should not allow them to be overlooked or denied an appropriate, just and acceptable solution. Anyone who hopes that it will is mistaken, because any problem that remains unsolved will be a source of rekindling conflict and voiding previous achievements. Serious solutions are those that do not ignore the rights of others in the hope that they will disappear with the passage of time.

It is high time for all deferred matters to be placed on the agenda of the negotiations and to be addressed in a spirit of earnest and objectivity and with the true will to find appropriate legal, just and acceptable solutions that would, in turn, make peace an acceptable option, protected and nurtured by the peoples of the region. We believe that this is the right path to peace and that the solution to such deferred problems as the question of refugees, Jerusalem, the sovereignty and the right of self-determination of the Palestinian people and the establishment of their own State, with its capital in Jerusalem, is the only guarantee of security, stability, progress and prosperity for all the peoples and countries of the region, Arab and Israeli alike.

The need for a comprehensive solution makes it necessary to resume the negotiations on the Lebanese and Syrian tracks at the point at which they stopped in order to achieve the necessary settlement on the basis of the Madrid framework, the principle of land for peace, and Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978). Progress towards and the achievement of peace are the surest ways to rein in extremism and violence and to establish safety and security.

The question of Jerusalem is one of the cores of the peace process. It is inevitable that a just solution to it will be found. There is a consensus at all international, legal and political levels that East Jerusalem is an integral part of the West Bank, occupied in 1967. It is therefore subject to the provisions of the Fourth Geneva Convention and of the Security Council's resolutions. The Security Council has accorded the city of Jerusalem special attention since the Israeli occupation began and has adopted a number of resolutions rejecting all Israeli legislation and measures aimed at altering the character of the Holy City and any other act to alter its geographic or demographic character.

On this basis, any measure that Israel has taken since the beginning of the Madrid process or will take to alter the demographic, political or legal status of

Jerusalem would be tantamount to creating a fait accompli and new facts on the ground to be imposed on the Arab side in the final status negotiations. This is unacceptable. In that context, and with a view to maintaining the historic, cultural and religious character of the Holy City, the Government of Jordan is keenly maintaining its protection of the holy places under the occupation so that they may continue to be immune to all prevailing threats in the region while they await the desired final solution. The city of Jerusalem is the spiritual capital of the three monotheistic religions. We therefore wish it to remain a noble symbol of coexistence and peace. The end of the occupation of the Arab part of the Holy City cannot entail a redivision of the city or the building of walls through its centre. It implies only the prevalence of justice and right in the city.

Before concluding, I would express my regret at the distortions of history retailed in the statement made by the Israeli representative yesterday when he described as annexation the voluntary unity, endorsed by an elected Parliament, of the two brotherly peoples of Jordan and Palestine in 1950. I wonder why such distortions of history should be necessary at a time when we believe that we must eschew and transcend the language of provocation, to enter into an era of peace. We believe that the United Nations, the embodiment of international legitimacy, has a vital role to play in promoting the peace process on the basis of General Assembly resolution 52/52. We believe that the European Union must pursue its efforts to complement those of the co-sponsors of the peace process, so that all the hard work done in every field by people of goodwill may support the process and meet the requirements of success. From the outset, the members of the European Union have made a particular contribution to the efforts for peace and continue to contribute to the economic development process.

My country looks forward to a wider and deeper understanding by the international community of the development and economic needs of the peoples and countries of the region, which have laid the foundation of peace. They cannot consider it abstractly, but must address it through concrete benefits.

Mr. Sychou (Belarus)(*interpretation from Russian*): The question of the situation in the Middle East has been before the United Nations since its founding more than 50 years ago. Unfortunately, its importance and timeliness for the peoples of the region and for all humankind has not lessened. Since the founding of our Organization, the Republic of Belarus has been deeply interested in a swift, peaceful settlement of the Middle East conflict on the basis of principles of international law, including the relevant Security Council and General Assembly resolutions.

Belarus was very pleased to learn of the signing on 23 October 1998 by the Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Palestine Liberation Organization and President of the Palestinian Authority, Mr. Yasser Arafat, and the Prime Minister of Israel, Mr. Benjamin Netanyahu, of the Wye River Memorandum and the accompanying documents. We view this agreement as a significant breakthrough in efforts to implement agreements previously achieved between the parties and to resume the peace process in the Middle East.

For the past year and a half, the international community, including our Republic, has followed with great concern the growing difficulties that have complicated the gradual development of Palestinian and Israeli dialogue. The prolonged lack of progress towards a peaceful settlement seen until recently has given rise to great tension in the region, as well as to disappointment and despair among the Palestinian population. The deterioration of the economic situation of the Palestinians, including the continuing fall in their living standards resulting from stagnation in the peace process, is a significant negative factor that has worsened an already critical situation. It seemed that the region could again be plunged into a whirlpool of unforeseen events, fraught with the danger of disrupting the peace process. In this context, the Wye River Memorandum, despite its temporary nature and the need for additional measures for a final settlement, is an extraordinarily important, timely step towards peace.

Giving new impetus to the settlement process begun in Madrid and consolidated in Oslo, the recent agreement should re-establish an atmosphere of mutual trust between the parties and restore hope for peace, stability and security in the Middle East. The compromise achieved at Wye Plantation is a clear reaffirmation of our firm conviction that even the most difficult conflicts between parties can be resolved only by peaceful, political means. Belarus hopes that the goodwill demonstrated by the signing of the Wye Memorandum will be given form in the scrupulous, timely implementation by both parties of their obligations, in strict compliance with the terms agreed on, without any reservations or additional conditions.

In this connection, we are encouraged by the troop redeployment from the West Bank and the recent opening of the international airport at Gaza, as well as the recent release of some 250 Palestinian prisoners and the start on 18 November of Palestinian and Israeli final status negotiations. Despite these important events, the Palestinians and Israelis have much to do for the practical realization of the Wye agreement and we sincerely hope they will be successful.

The parties must fully demonstrate complete political commitment to their undertakings and readiness to firmly resist the extremist forces that are attempting to make progress towards genuine peace impossible. In this context, we unreservedly condemn terrorism and political extremism in all their forms. We must not allow the opponents of the peace process to block a timely implementation of the Wye Memorandum, which would jeopardize prospects for a definitive settlement. We commend the firm measures taken by the Palestinian Authority to stop the activities of extremist organizations in the territories under their control, measures which reflect the Palestinians' genuine dedication to the implementation of their obligations.

While it is very important to strengthen trust and establish cooperation between the parties, Belarus stresses the inadmissibility of any unilateral steps to predetermine the outcome of negotiations on final status, which would create tensions in this context. We are concerned with the continuation of the Israeli practice of building settlements on the West Bank and in the Gaza Strip and with the decision taken in June 1998 to extend Jerusalem's municipal boundaries. Belarus sees these steps as unconstructive and not conducive to trust and relaxation of tensions between the parties. On the basis of the assumption that lasting economic development is a guarantee for social political stability in the Middle East, primarily among the Palestinian population, we feel it necessary that intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations continue and increase their activities to lend economic support to the Palestinians to facilitate the settlement of this difficult situation as soon as possible.

In this connection, we greatly commend the selfless work of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, which, despite its serious financial crisis, continues to give social and economic assistance to the Palestinian refugees. We also note the important role of the United Nations Special Coordinator in the Occupied Territories in coordinating and making available to the Palestinian people diverse forms of assistance through the various bodies of the United Nations system. Belarus also expresses the hope that the Ministerial Conference of donor countries taking place in Washington as of 30 November 1998 to support the Middle East peace process will achieve concrete results to help the economic situation of the Palestinians.

In the context of the recent signing of the Wye River Memorandum, the Republic of Belarus has great hopes that success in the Palestinian and Israeli talks will create the necessary conditions to resume the Syrian and Lebanese tracks of the dialogue. Without significant progress in this area, genuine peace in the Middle East is not possible.

In conclusion, allow us to reaffirm our Republic's deep dedication to a comprehensive settlement of the conflict in the Middle East, based on the terms of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), on the land-for-peace formula and on respect for the rights of all States in the region to live in peace within secure internationally recognized borders. We are confident that the final outcome of the settlement will be the attainment by the Palestinian people of its legal rights to self-determination and independence. Belarus, for its part, is ready to make all possible international efforts and to support all United Nations measures aimed at achieving durable peace in the region. As was stressed by the Prime Minister of Belarus, Mr. Syargei Ling, in his message of 30 November 1998 on the occasion of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, we believe there is no alternative to a just and comprehensive peace process in the Middle East.

Mr. Al-Sindi (Yemen) (*interpretation from Arabic*): The Republic of Yemen attaches great importance to the development of the situation in the Middle East. We have always strongly supported the peace process. The process that began at the Madrid Conference in 1991 was aimed at bringing about a comprehensive and just settlement on the basis of the principle of land for peace and of the resolutions adopted by the international community, particularly Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978), and all of the agreements that ensued, which reconfirmed the need to have a comprehensive, just and lasting peace as a basis for security, stability and prosperity in the region. The objective was to eradicate violence, eliminate extremism and strengthen the foundations for peaceful coexistence.

The Republic of Yemen welcomes the efforts made by the United States of America as a sponsor of the peace process, which helped lead to the signing of the Wye River Memorandum in October by President Arafat and Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu in the presence of President Clinton and King Hussein of Jordan. My country, which called on Israel to respect and comply with that agreement, is disturbed to see that Israel is creating obstacles and continuing with its declarations regarding the construction of settlements. Indeed, at the very moment when it was signing the agreement, it was calling for bids for the building of settlements in part of occupied East Jerusalem, at Jebel Abu-Ghneim. Therefore, we emphasize the importance of achieving a comprehensive solution, leading to the Palestinian people's enjoyment of their legitimate rights, especially the right to self-determination and to the establishment of an independent State, with its capital at Al-Quds al-Sharif.

While appreciating the efforts made by the United States of America to bring about a just and lasting peace in the Middle East, the Republic of Yemen would like to stress here the need for that country to make tireless efforts in order to ensure that negotiations resume on the Syrian and Lebanese tracks from where they left off. We appeal to that sponsor of the peace process — indeed, to both sponsors of the peace process — to urge the Israeli Government to agree in earnest to the resumption of the peace process and to prepare for complete withdrawal from the Syrian Golan, southern Lebanon and the western Bekaa.

The implementation of the principles of legally binding international agreements with regard to, *inter alia*, the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by force and the principle of land for peace — a principle enshrined in international resolutions, at the Madrid Conference and in the Oslo agreements — would lead to stability and prosperity in the Middle East and would strengthen the new values of tolerance, peaceful coexistence and mutual cooperation.

Any lasting, just and comprehensive peace in the Middle East must be accompanied by efforts to free the region from all weapons of mass destruction. There must be verification and commitment. In this context, I should like to refer to paragraph 7 of resolution 46/30, which calls on the Secretary-General to continue consultations with States in the region and other interested States with a view to taking measures and working for the establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the Middle East.

I should also like to take this opportunity to state that the Republic of Yemen has already ratified the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty, which was signed by the Prime Minister of my country. We hope that that Treaty will also be signed by all States in the region without exception. We hope that dialogue, understanding and peaceful coexistence among the countries of the region will prevail over the arms race.

Mr. Lavrov (Russian Federation) (*interpretation from Russian*): The General Assembly is again considering the situation in the Middle East, one of the most complex and long-standing problems of our time. The international community has been anxiously following developments in the region over the past year, noting with hope any positive shifts and reacting with concern and distress to outbreaks of tension and confrontation. As a sponsor of the Middle East peace process, Russia has always worked for the swift resumption of negotiations on all Arab-Israeli tracks without exception, and in particular for the achievement of real progress on the Palestinian-Israeli track.

The Russian approach is based on the fundamental elements of the peace process, primarily the Madrid formula, which is based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) and on the principle of land for peace. We are pleased to note the beginnings of a thaw in the Palestinian-Israeli dialogue. Moscow welcomes the practical implementation of the Wye River Memorandum between Palestine and Israel allowing for the resumption of the implementation of measures in the transitional period in the Palestinian territories and of negotiations on final status. The agreement is aimed at broadening Palestinian self-rule, ensuring security in Palestinian-Israeli relations and resolving problems that are vitally important to Palestinians, Israelis and the entire region. We note the special role played by the United States as a sponsor in working out the compromise. The Russian side was also active in trying to bring the sides closer together, and an important contribution was made by the European Union.

It would be logical to reflect this dynamic in a General Assembly resolution indicating clearly the direction to be taken on the road to peace and security in the Middle East. Unfortunately, it has not been possible to agree on such a resolution this year, but that certainly does not mean that the United Nations has not taken note of the development of that dynamic on the basis of the Madrid principles. While pointing to progress made, we must express concern about the reactivation of Israel's settlement policy, including the report of bidding for building an Israeli settlement in the Har Homa area —

Jebel Abu-Ghneim — in East Jerusalem. The Palestinian leadership is right to consider that action a violation of agreements that are in force, a stumbling block to further movement in negotiations and an impediment to the restoration of trust between the Palestinians and the Israelis. Such unilateral actions run counter to the norms of international law and are detrimental to a settlement in the region.

We urge the parties not to take measures that would prejudge the outcome of the forthcoming negotiations on the final status of the Palestinian territories, including Jerusalem, and the problem of Israeli settlements. We urge them to refrain from confrontational rhetoric and to comply with commitments made.

We expect the measures contained in the Memorandum to be implemented within the agreed time-frames, and we will do our utmost to encourage that. The results should prompt the sponsors to take further strong measures urgently with a view to unblocking the situation on the remaining negotiating tracks — the Syrian-Israeli and the Lebanese-Israeli tracks — because otherwise there can be no firm peace in the Middle East.

The basis for further negotiations between Syria and Israel is already formulated, and Security Council resolution 425 (1978) provides a firm international legal basis for a settlement of relations between Lebanon and Israel.

We welcome Israel's recognition of Security Council resolution 425 (1978). However that is not enough: what is needed is practical implementation. Russia will continue to promote a swift resumption of constructive dialogue on all of these interrelated tracks.

As a sponsor of the peace process, we attach great importance to the economic development of the Palestinian territories, including effective action by the donor structures geared towards promoting Palestinian self-rule and the economic and social development of the Palestinian territories. Russian representatives participated in the Conference to support Middle East Peace and Development, which began yesterday, 30 November, in Washington, and which dealt with these matters.

Untying the Middle East knot is a job for everybody. A variety of means is being used. The best minds and the leading statesmen of the entire world are involved in this effort, and a special role certainly belongs to the United Nations.

Russia, as a sponsor of the peace process in the Middle East, will continue to work hard to find mutually acceptable solutions and compromises in the positions of the parties concerned.

Mr. Konishi (Japan): Japan welcomes the signing of the Wye River Memorandum on 23 October, which broke the stalemate that had prevailed in the peace process since March 1997. On behalf of the Government of Japan, I wish to pay high tribute to the parties concerned for their good-faith efforts, which have resulted in this historic accord. I should also like to express the appreciation of my Government to the United States for convening the Wye River meeting and for its role in mediating the accord. His Majesty King Hussein of Jordan is owed a particular debt of gratitude for his wise and generous participation in the talks leading to the agreement.

Recognizing the importance of sustaining the momentum generated by the Wye River agreement, Japan welcomed the opportunity to participate in the Conference to Support Middle East Peace and Development, which began on 30 November, in Washington D.C., under the sponsorship of the United States Government. On that occasion, Japan pledged up to $200 million in assistance to the Palestinians over the next two years. In the conviction that cooperation and coordination among donors will continue to be important in the effective implementation of assistance, Japan intends to cooperate actively with donors through mechanisms such as the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee.

As one of the major contributors to the peace process, Japan has disbursed more than $370 million in grant aid to Palestinians since 1991. Combined with the amount pledged in Washington last month, Japan's aid to the Palestinians will amount to approximately $570 million. In July of this year the Government of Japan established an office in Gaza to ensure that such aid is used effectively; the Japan International Cooperation Agency also plans to open an office in the region.

Japan's assistance has been focused on activities to support the start-up and institutional capacity-building of the Palestinian Authority, basic infrastructure, Palestinian refugee relief and the development of employment opportunities. Japan intends to widen the scope of its assistance to also include human resources development in the areas of education and health, the improved governance of the Palestinian Authority, environmental protection, cultural and youth exchanges and industrial promotion. In addition, my country intends to provide assistance through the United Nations Development Programme for such projects as the building of infrastructure to secure safe passage between the West Bank and Gaza, which is essential to the implementation of the Wye River agreement.

I would like to mention here that, in addition to supporting the peace process through financial assistance, Japan is actively contributing personnel, including through the dispatch of its Self-Defence Forces to the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force.

Japan has supported the current peace process since it was launched in Madrid in 1991. It has been an active participant in the multinational consultative group and has also been making various efforts at the bilateral level to encourage the Israeli and Arab parties to make further progress in the peace process. Multilaterally as well as bilaterally, Japan has sought to promote relations of mutual confidence among the parties concerned by supporting the implementation of the agreements to which the parties have committed themselves. Japan is determined to take every opportunity to facilitate the peace process by fostering an environment that is conducive to direct negotiations between the parties concerned.

The Government of Japan hopes that both parties will work towards the smooth implementation of all the provisions of the Wye River Memorandum. We are encouraged by recent positive actions by the Israeli side, including its approval, at a Ministerial meeting on 19 November, of the implementation of phase one of the redeployment in the West Bank and, subsequently, the preparations by the Israeli forces for withdrawal. The opening of the Gaza airport on 24 November is also a welcome development. Japan hopes that the redeployment and other measures on which agreement was reached will continue to be steadily implemented.

It is important that the final settlement talks, as well as negotiations on the third phase of the redeployment of Israeli troops, commence without delay. Again, I would stress that the two sides must strive to build mutual confidence, because the resolution of the outstanding issues between them will depend to an increasing degree on their own efforts. To this end, and as was made clear in the Wye River Memorandum, both parties should refrain from taking any unilateral actions that could destabilize the situation.

Unfortunately, however, extremists on both sides who engage in acts of terrorism continue to be a source of concern. The ultimate target of such acts is, of course, the peace process itself, which is our only hope for a final settlement. The Government of Japan does not tolerate terrorism in any form and commends the authorities of both Palestine and Israel for refusing to succumb to the threat of terrorism and for demonstrating their commitment to the smooth implementation of the peace process.

In closing, I would simply like to stress that highest priority must be given to direct talks by the parties concerned, including those responsible for further progress on the Lebanese and Syrian tracks.

The President (*interpretation from Spanish*): I call on the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic, who wishes to make a statement in exercise of the right of reply.

Mr. Wehbe (Syrian Arab Republic) (*interpretation from Arabic*): This afternoon, the General Assembly heard a statement by the representative of Israel that was full of allegations and distortions. Those distortions reveal a spirit of aggression, occupation and settlerism. That representative tried to speak of Syrian forces in southern Lebanon, a matter utterly unrelated to developments in the peace process or indeed to the situation in the Middle East.

The representative of Israel is the last person to have the right to raise such issues: Israel does not merely have forces based in southern Lebanon; it is the occupier of that area. Syrian forces, on the other hand, entered Lebanon to help and save our brethren in that country at the invitation of the Government and the people of Lebanon. They called upon Syria to save Lebanon from a civil war that Israel had welcomed as enabling it to continue its occupation and to keep plundering the wealth of Lebanon.

There is a long record of daily acts of aggression by Israel against the valiant people of Lebanon and against the Lebanese resistance, to which the United Nations Charter gives legitimacy. Can anyone really believe that those who are defending their occupied land, who are fighting to recover it from the clutches of the occupier, are terrorists? What historical definition or understanding could lead to such a characterization? Why else did the Charter provide for the inherent right of self-defence? All relevant resolutions of international legitimacy have condemned Israeli aggression, occupation and settlement in the occupied Arab territories. Resistance is a legitimate right, indeed a sacred right.

Israel is the last to be in a position to speak of terrorism, especially since occupation heads the list of acts of terrorism. The latest example of such terrorism was the massacre perpetrated by Israel at Qana, in southern Lebanon. That exemplifies the ultimate terrorism: State terrorism. I do not understand how the representative of any State can speak so shamelessly of terrorism while his own country practices the ugliest form of terrorism: invading southern Lebanon in its Operation Grapes of Wrath. Where are the grapes of peace for which that representative calls?

Syria opened the door to the convening of the Madrid Peace Conference with abundant good will and with a determination to achieve a just, lasting and comprehensive peace. But Israel closed that door. Israel has refused to resume the peace process on the inseparable Syrian and Lebanese tracks from the point at which it was suspended. Earlier this afternoon, the Assembly heard that fact reaffirmed by my brother, the representative of Lebanon.

How can the representative of Israel explain away what he said in his statement about the question of Palestine? Yesterday he invoked certain religious claims to the Golan, while this afternoon in his statement on the situation in the Middle East he spoke of "secure borders". The occupation of the Syrian Golan is indeed a security issue. Let me refer the representative of Israel to the thick volume of Security Council and other resolutions of international legitimacy, all condemning Israeli occupation of the Golan, of southern Lebanon, of Palestinian territories and of Arab Jerusalem. Suffice it to remind him that President George Bush too stressed that geography cannot achieve security. The sole guarantee of security is a just and comprehensive peace based on the Madrid principles, which are in turn founded on the implementation of relevant Security Council resolutions and the principle of land for peace. The latter principle is the very cornerstone of the initiative that President Bush set out before the United States Congress on 6 March 1991. It is the very principle on which the Madrid peace process was founded. It is the very spirit of Security Council resolution 242 (1967), which speaks of the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by force.

That principle underscores the need for complete Israeli withdrawal from the occupied Syrian Golan to the line of 4 June 1967, as well as from southern Lebanon. The line of 4 June 1967 was the line that the Israeli forces of aggression crossed into the Syrian Golan; it is therefore self-evident and natural that in accordance with Security Council resolution 242 (1967) we should demand that that line be restored.

If Israel wants comprehensive peace, the door is open to the resumption of the peace process from the point at which it was suspended in the previous peace talks.

However, Israel must not attempt to mislead the world by speaking of peace while working for expansion and settlements and escalating tension and violence. We believe that the world has become quite expert about Israel's terrorist practices and policies which are based on terrorism. The world will no longer allow Israel to continue its attempts to mislead it because history is the best witness of all the myths and distortions, religious or otherwise, that run counter to international laws and resolutions agreed and adopted by the international community.

I should like to add in conclusion that a return by the General Assembly to the reports of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories would provide sufficient evidence of the Israeli policy of terror.

The representative in question, while attempting to throw stones at others, has forgotten that he lives in a glass house.

Syria is committed to a just and comprehensive peace. We reaffirm our desire to resume the peace process from the point where it was suspended. It is not reasonable or acceptable for talks to resume at square one and to ignore the arduous negotiations which resulted in agreements already concluded.

The meeting rose at 6.25 p.m.